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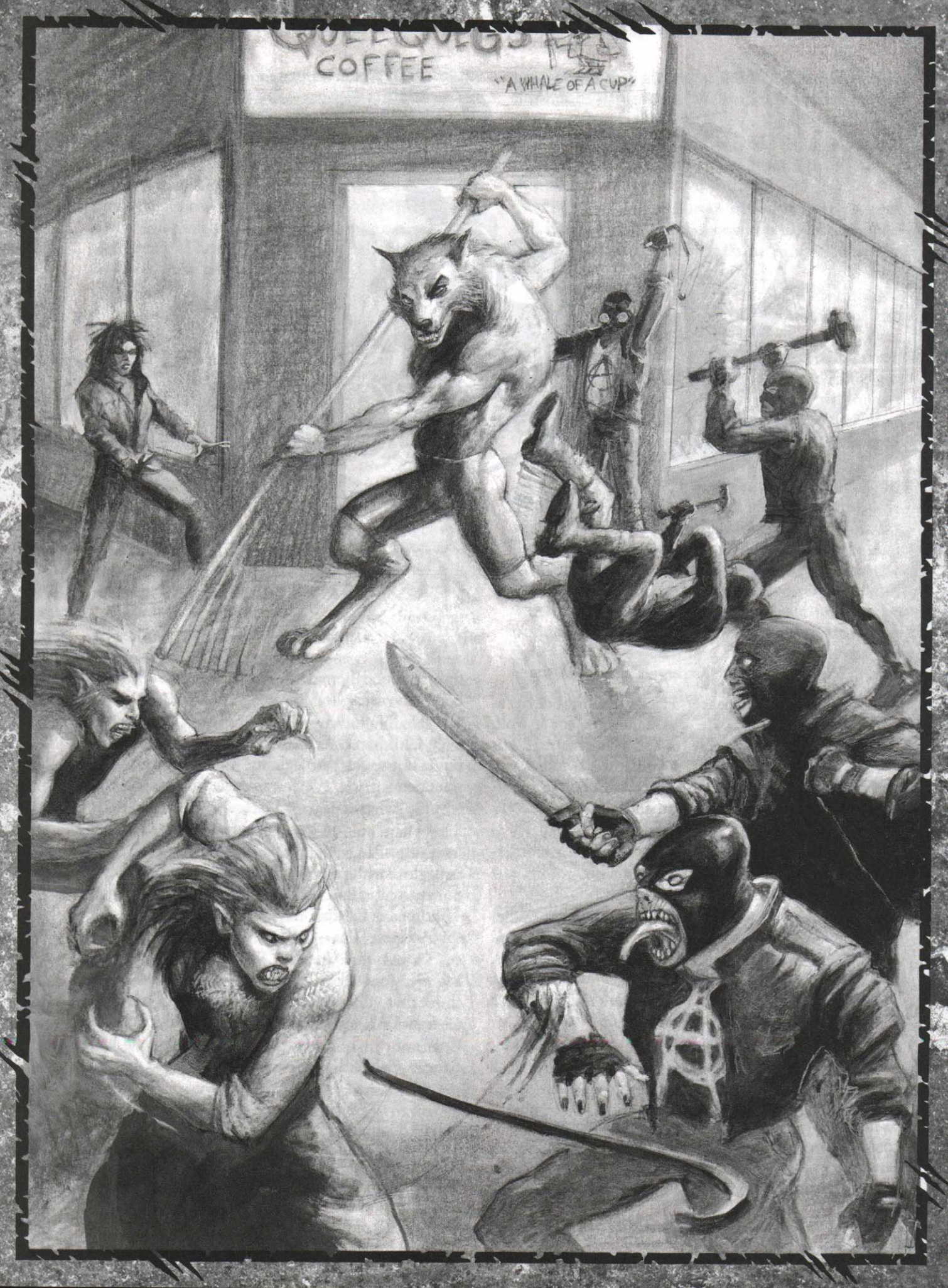
CHILDREN of GAIA™


COFFEE
"A WHALE OF A CUP"

Running and Clumping

Seattle, November 30, 1999

"Mandy, what is peace?" Hack walked beside her as the others followed. He was handsome for a wolf, Ringer thought, with gray fur and a short muzzle. His tail stood high in the Seattle wind. It was before dawn, the streets empty save for the protestors like themselves walking to the Sheraton and Roosevelt Hotels.

"Peace? Well, the Children always say it's a struggle." A smile split Amanda Barret's California-blond face. In human form she was a big woman in a peasant dress and a hand-knit sweater.

"A struggle? Isn't that, well, kind of a contradiction in terms?" Steep Seattle hills worked Ringer's legs. Shop windows showed him to himself, same as always. Asian guy with hair falling in his face, wearing jeans and a t-shirt saying *If gays and lesbians are given equal rights then EVERYONE will want them.*

"No, not really. For us, Rage is really less of a struggle. Just like... water pouring out. You feel it, all through you, and you know, nothing feels that good." Her face was troubled briefly. "Nothing. War, whoever it serves, is easy."

"But war is the Wyrm's work!" Joné came up beside Mandy, dark eyes in an oval coffee-and-cream face framed by dreadlocks. She pulled her fleece jacket tighter round her in the chill breeze. Cargo pants, boots, the usual.

"No. Not always. The Garou are Gaia's warriors, even Children of Gaia. We fight, and we're made to fight. But we can struggle for something else besides the enemy dying. We can struggle for peace."

"So, what is peace?" Hack was insistent.

"There are, they say, four struggles." Mandy was lecturing. Ringer didn't mind. "First, easiest, is the struggle to make war just. We've been trying that since Sumeria, more since the Romans invented civil rights. That means fighting for something worthwhile, like the Amazon War—"

"—not the Vietnam War, or the Gulf War... Mandy," Joné asked, "a just war is just a war! Don't you think that violence itself is the enemy? That we have to transform ourselves, become something better?" Cars went by honking ferociously, were gone before Ringer could see what was going on.

"I'm getting to that." Mandy was clearly in her element.

Rich muttered, "Damn longwinded talesingers!" and walked further forward. Kevin watched his tall, red-headed packmate, human shape hiding the Crinos form Rich had been born to, and wondered

what Garou tale Rich hadn't heard, these many years a metis.

Ringer hoped Rich wouldn't have a seizure today.

"You fight for a reason, for a reason that can't be solved with talk, or where the others won't listen, or, hell, for your life. A Thunderwyrm won't listen, nor a Skull Pig. But workers at Pentex? Voters in a logging town? They might. The second struggle we wage is for right in war. The old knight's code, if they had lived by it. Don't harm people who aren't fighters—"

"Non-Garou, in other words." Ringer clarified.

"Not all of them. Kin fight beside Garou, and watch out for those crazy humans who can use Gifts too." Ringer nodded and dropped back behind his pack, taking a rearguard position, not as if Madison Street was a battlefield, but you never knew.

"Observe truces, don't harm emissaries, don't let your troops rape and plunder, exchange prisoners. Accept an honorable surrender. Observe caerns as peace areas. This goes back to Tree-of-Battles; he was a Child of Gaia in the Middle Ages."

"How does the Wyrm observe truces? I have never heard of this." Hack's growls turned the heads of two punks passing with signs; Ringer, tailing, heard one mutter, "Is that a real wolf?"

"Well, the Wyrm doesn't observe the Geneva Accords exactly, but we usually aren't fighting the Wyrm itself. We fight *people*: fomori, Black Spirals, humans, whatever. And they are just in war, or they aren't. But we do the best we can. Set an example."

The edges of the protest were visible ahead. Ringer surveyed his pack. Mandy and Joné walked with Hack, just two women with a "dog" (or so the people chose to believe, having other concerns). He was behind and Rich ahead, looking like an ugly man. The truth, in Rich's case, was worse.

"The third struggle is for civil order, for a peaceful society. Here you work for civility in caerns and in moots, in dealing with Garou, with Kin and with humans, being decent to your neighbors, even to—"

"People who work for Chrysanthemum Milk?" Joné smiled. Ahead, a dozen people in sea turtle costumes went into the demonstration, the street still mostly dark and streetlamps lit.

"Them too. The more violence and fear in society, the stronger the Wyrm becomes. Here it's harder than the other two, because it's constant, and because we have to demonstrate to humans that it *can* be done. That's why we're here, to protest the way that companies like Good House and Endron run roughshod over countries, kill people who try to stop them, market stuff that destroys people's lives. We have to speak out here, where they all are for the WTO meeting. And this has its dangers too. We want civil peace but we want justice too. It's—"

"—the Weaver!" Hack barked. "Sameness, calmness, stillness. That isn't peace! It's not the Mother's way for moose to lie down with wolves."

"I know, I know. But we still have to try; fomori and Banes make it hard enough on us, let alone the humans. And Her Webbyness helps us against the Wyrm." She took a deep breath.

Rich moved a barrier and let the others through. The pack lined up with other protestors for the demonstration. Turtles jostled Teamsters, teenagers in bandannas and Starter jackets, a group of church ladies carrying banners against powdered milk that said "1.5 Million Die Each Year" and had a picture of a Chrysanthemum Milk container. Arms locked as the protestors barricaded the hotels where the conference was scheduled.

"There is a fourth struggle, and sometimes we mistake it for the whole deal, but it's not. It's struggling against violence itself, the hardest fight of all. Not only do humans—" Hack growled "—and wolves get mad easily, but getting mad feels good! Rage is powerful because it's *part* of us, and it's addictive too. If it wasn't we wouldn't do it! We have to work at healing the world, and ourselves. It's—" The protesters caught sight of WTO officials in a limousine and began to chant and wave posters. "Nobody in! Nobody out! Nobody in! Nobody out! Hell no WTO! Hell no WTO!" Ringer was amazed at the rock-concert size of the crowd. Mike at the Direct Action Network meeting had said there were seventy thousand people there, the biggest anti-corporate protest ever.

Giant puppets on long cane poles swayed and danced above the crowd in the distance. "There they are!" Joné cried, eyes shifted to wolf in her face. "We'd better get over there and help them start the rite." The pack strode off through the crowd to where other Garou waited.

Arms locked, arms round each other, a chain of bodies... embarrassing, kind of. The line of Garou, Kin and human protestors stretched out of sight around the hotel. The barricade was not just a barricade.

"Thought you liked holding guys' hands, big fella!" Joné was her usual self, Ragabash, ragamuffin and raggedyass.

"Depends on the guys... Ryan Philippe is one thing, but some of these haven't washed in a while." Ringer looked at Mandy again; she was still waiting for the squeeze that signified that the circle was closed. They held hands up to let masked and costumed protestors through who would dance in front of the

hotel while the Rite of the Circle focused the will of Gaia's Children. Rich, on Ringer's right, squeezed his hand; he passed the signal to Joné. Hack was patrolling in wolf shape, acting like a big stupid dog, keeping eyes out for trouble. He put up with pets and caresses from dog-loving protestors. Some Tutte Bianchi protestors from Italy came through handing out bottles of water. Two other Garou, gifted with the powers of Spider (and how they got her favor, Ringer didn't want to know), swarmed up the sides of the building carrying long rolls of banner to drape down the sides.

There might be trouble. *Yeah.*

The chant started with Mandy and the other leaders intoning the Charge to keep Gaia's ways alive, then the response from all, then protest chants. The whole circle wasn't always in synch, but Mandy had said that "unity of will" was the key. Ringer willed silently for the WTO leaders to see the human side of their horrible search for profit. Signs proclaimed "No More Frankenfoods" and showed a monster zucchini with bolts in its jaws walking in heavy brogans. Change hearts and minds, then the rest will follow. Maybe.

The chanting went on, police walking up and down the line, puzzled at the ritual. He heard one of them mutter something about "levitating the Pentagon." What that was all about, he had no idea. The chant suddenly fell into rhythm with a troop of drummers and the climbers unrolled huge banners with "Whose Streets? Our Streets" and "People Not Profit!" on them.

The crowd parted, and drummers encircled the dancing sea turtles while protestors clapped and whistled. The turtles moved smoothly, so agile that Ringer looked closer.....

Was the circle still holding for the Rite?

Dancing... screaming. The pack turned as one, saw a tide of humanity crushing the crowd like waves in the sea. Ringer grabbed Joné and felt Hack press between them; he hissed *Pick up your feet*, and she did as the crowd surged, carried them. Tear gas! No wonder protesters were panicking. She fell from his arms, wiping her eyes. Two scared-looking human kids were between them. Then... Hack growled *Wyrmstink* at him and the two Garou broke into an open space in the crowd. Gas took him then and he couldn't see the stampede as it rushed by and past him. The snap of guns panicked him; he felt the smack of rubber bullets (damn, they hurt!) and heard more screams as police fired into the crowd. *Boom!* went a concussion grenade and people fell, hurt, maybe badly.

The gas tore at his eyes. It hurt, horribly, enough to make him rage. His stomach turned cold when he realized that other Garou would rage too.....

"Kevin." Water washed over his eyes, made them better. He blinked. Brown swam in his vision, waving shapes that focused into dreadlocks. It was Joné holding his arm. "Open your eyes. I know it hurts, but you have to." He tried, shut them again, and managed to get them open for a moment. The pain was going. "Good. Come on, help me here." She handed him a bottle of eyewash solution. There were a dozen or so down, faces contorted with pain. "Hurry. Cops will be here soon." She moved from figure to figure, talking softly on a cell phone to a medical team, and Kevin tried to help her. Sometimes people thrashed blindly, spilling the water; sometimes they seemed hurt worse than tear gas could do. "Joné? This guy's dead out."

"What? Okay." The black woman finished washing the eyes of a girl and came to Ringer. The boy he was shaking rolled limply, a handsome face with lip rings and plug earrings. "Jesus. Heart's barely beating." She rolled an eyelid up. "He's 'bout gone. Ringer, I've never seen someone nerve gassed....." Ringer jumped. "Don't freak, man. Stay cool. Stay cool. We have to get this guy to a real doctor." With her other hand she tapped through the Ruckus Society's documents on first aid.

"What'll help him?" If the answer was *nothing*, Ringer was going to lose it.

"Atropine. He didn't get enough gas to kill him. The Gifts to heal this... we don't know them. Might even be some Wyrm-stuff in the gas. I think. Shit. You wanna take them?"

Hack had been sniffing the downed protestors. "Joné, there's another guy that smells like this one. He's out too." Ringer silently blessed the wolf-born sense of smell, not just having a wolf's nose but knowing how to use it. Hack showed them a skater lying curled on the pavement, hair fiery pink against skin gone death-pale. Hack tugged at his ears; no response. "They're alive, okay? We can get them to help in a few minutes... if we Change. You guys carry them. I'll run interference."

"But... the Veil." Ringer was suddenly afraid, badly afraid. They'd never been this bold. Humans went crazy and sometimes remembered to lash out at the "monsters."

"I'll run ahead in and call a warning, okay? Look, they're two-legs, like you. Let's make Mom proud." Mandy and Rich nodded and shifted to Glabro, while Joné and Ringer took the Crinos and picked up the humans, suddenly light as cardboard to the manwolf-form's huge muscles. Hack ran ahead, barking out directions and cautions. The pack tore through streets blasted by riot, dodged protestors and police. A few shouted or dodged in the drifting fog of smoke and

gas. Once Rich roared, darted ahead of the pack and simply shoved a barricade flat while the pack raced through. Another time Ringer glimpsed a Victory Shoes store with black-clad anarchists looting it. Some idealism *that* was! Joné was talking calmly all the time on the hands-free phone system of her Visor, alerting medical and communications teams throughout the protestors' non-organization.

Ringer reflected later that the first aid team would never figure it out. It wasn't that the pack were invisible, just that Rage moved them faster than human eyes could track. Anyone watching would have seen them... *appear* at the stand with the two kids in their arms. Mandy, back in human shape, told them what they needed to know and the med-tech there nodded and started prepping the kid for a shot. The pack moved back to the protests, where a performance troupe was trying to set up an art zone in a street of shops. The actors marked a stage area with colored chalk and began drawing a design within it, a mazelike pattern.

"Watch out. Anarchy on tap really soon." Hack growled softly. Black masks, black outfits, were all Ringer saw. Five people moved down the street, smashing windows at a Queequeg's Coffee ("A Whale of a Cup!" the cartoon harpooner in the window claimed), O'Tolley's, and an art gallery. They used sledges on the windows and trashed the shop signs with slingshots, shooting what looked like eggs full of some fluid. Why masks, Ringer wondered? If you're right, why hide? If you're wrong, well, why are you doing what you're doing? People had fled into the shops and were screaming now. Two guys rushed them from the coffee shop, trying a tackle, and the anarchists cracked one on the head with crowbars, making the other man flee. Smoke drifted from a firebomb somewhere. "That's not paint in those eggs they're shooting," Mandy said as the pack spread out in front of the food pantry's doors. Ringer brandished his staff. "It's etching fluid!" Glass dissolved and a woman ran covering her face. "She could have burned eyes. Watch out, everyone."

The black masks came closer, came raging at the pack. In the eyeholes of masks Ringer saw... that wasn't human skin. "Fomori!" he whispered. "Keep them off." As the rocks fell, Ringer struck as many as he could out of the air in a flurry of *Isten Kima Ummanate*. The "anarchists" shouted at him, furious.

"Down with private property! Stop defending your exploiters!"

"Go back! You'll help no one by attacking here!" Joné moved from standing behind Rich to standing beside him. A whiff of tear gas blew down the street. The fomori charged. Fangs filled one huge mouth. He felt Rage swell, power, danger, death, felt the Crinos coming if he let it. No telling what he'd do then. No knowing afterwards, sometimes.

That was a blessing. Here goes nothing, Ringer thought, and Changed. The fomori didn't hesitate. They look smaller from up here, anyway, Ringer thought as he felt the staff grow with him. Rich and Mandy shifted to Glabro and joined him. He tripped one fomor, felt a sledgehammer blow from another, the pain almost meaningless to the Crinos form as he healed.... Mandy aimed a disarm at the leader, got a blow for her trouble. Disjointedly, Ringer could hear Joné talking to someone, likely a fear-spirit, on her Visor. Something cold brushed by him, something too horrid to be real, something stinking of cow parts and puke. He slammed the staff into the next "anarchist's" solar plexus and sent him sprawling. The three standing fled.

"Ha! Who says Children of Gaia can't fight?" Ringer shifted back to human as bystanders emerged from hiding, and the pack howled in triumph. They walked away, leaving the fallen foe where he clutched his gut in pain. Two of the actors left the doorway and restrained the guy. Do I like hurting people, Ringer wondered? Or is it just that I don't want my friends, my buddies, hurt and don't care how I do it?

"Those guys were cowards," Joné said. "I saw a communications report that they've been just hitting shit and running. So I wondered if cashing in my favors... would help."

"Thanks, Joné. Good thinking. Who's your scary friend?" The ambience was almost gone, only a touch of queasy lingering.

"Hellrazer is a fear-spirit I met websurfing in the Umbra. I think he borrowed a lot of his personality from bad slasher flicks, but I don't mind it much. He really likes possessing DVDs and frightening people so bad they wet their living-room rugs... I keep him provided with bootleg movie files and he shows up when I need him."

Gaia, Ringer thought. How weird could you get? "Hey, Joné, could you introduce me to Jonny Quest?"

"Which version? We'll talk later."

The pack turned a corner and came upon some of the Uktena who'd marched with the native-rights protests. "John Oldway!" Mandy cried while Ringer wished he could remember so many people's names. "You guys okay?" The middle-aged man, face lined with decades of American sun, shook his head.

"Three Kin down with this gas, one hit her head. I think we'd better get out."

"Look, we can help... give us a minute with the hurt chick, okay?" Rich cradled the woman's head in his arms and confusion and pain cleared from her face. Gaia was indeed bountiful. "You guys think you can make it to where we're rallying on Deal Street? We think we can get to the back of the hotel from there and then block the WTO guys from getting in."

"Yeah, I think we can now that Susan's fine." The young woman, glossy black hair drawn back in a barrette, smiled and hugged Rich, who looked pleased at the female attention.

"We met some anarchists, Black Bloc guys, who were really fomori... twisted fuckers. Watch it, okay?" The old Native American nodded.

"Yeah...anarchists, why are they even here?"

"I think... Joné?" Mandy turned to the younger woman.

"The ACME guys are here to basically oppose any kind of government, any kind of system. They follow this weirdo named John Zerzan who's from Eugene and has a website. Anarchy-primitive guy, human Talon really, loved the Unabomber, tells guys to trash shit to make the world a better place. They're the ones that have been on the live webcasts, smashing things and stuff. Lots of the others just want the corporations reined in, but these guys like violence and trashing — and you know how mobs get. Once one person starts breaking glass, everyone gets into it. These bastards were even planning to mess this place up and let us take the rap. They suck, basically, is what it all boils down to."

There was a lull in the trouble, and the pack sat and watched some protest plays broadcast on Joné's Visor. Unsurprisingly, the networks were showing looters and window breakers, nothing else.

Noon, November 30, 1999

The labor march on Fifth was huge, forty thousand people at least, unions, worker's groups, spouses, children, trucks and floats, on and on and on. Signs attacked O'Tolley's, Victory Shoes, NorthAm Steel, Young & Smith, for deserting their American homes, their American workers, desecrating and polluting the land, destroying forests and oceans to make every kind of garbage. Ringer watched, unable to understand. "All these guys, for this?" *For Gaia?*, he wondered. The alternative was *for me?*

"Fuckin' awesome, huh?" It was Joné, arm around him as they watched the huge parade of beefy steelworkers and solid-looking women with *Eat Your Import* and *Yankee Come Home* signs. He hugged her back, glad of the company. "Yeah, the unions have been organizing for months for this. Not all of it on the Net, but I kept track of everything, even worked as a go-between for phone numbers and meeting places. We—" More police sirens. *Damn*, Ringer thought, *not again*. Cops appeared and started yelling at the union marchers to disband, Ringer thought, although he couldn't hear anything over the chanting of tens of thousands of people. There was no response to the cops' shout, and soon after they charged into the crowd, pepper spray arcing into the workers.

"Shit!" Wooden bullets hit Joné and she yelled in pain. They clacked onto the street and Ringer saw that they were two inches long.

Ringer said, "Back to the pack," and the two of them tried to push their way across Fifth in the confusion and crush of people. This was one of the times when being a martial artist was actually helpful, Ringer was thinking, when a rubber bullet smacked (ouch!) into his temple. It hurt a lot.

"This crowd must disperse! Leave this area immediately!" shouted a cop with a bullhorn in one hand and a gas gun in the other. He was leaning out of a van. He pulled back inside and gun barrels pointed out instead.

"Go fuck yourself! We gotta right to protest. Power for the people!" shouted a woman with a *Fair Trade Not Free Trade* t-shirt. She ducked and the wooden bullets hit her anyway, great bleeding wounds on her head.

A roar of flame turned his head: a dumpster was on fire, then two. He saw a man with a cigarette lighter as burning paper and softwood pallets from construction lit and black smoke billowed up from it. "Shit, this really hurts. Can we get in a doorway for a minute?" In the street a cop was beating a man who had chained himself to a protest float, the baton blows audible even through the screams. She helped him into an alley and he shifted to Glabro, let the huge welt from the bullet heal, then back into the street. Hack rejoined them there, evidently running from something. Ringer caught a glimpse of a horrible, twisted Wyrm-face that grinned in recognition or hunger. Joné screamed and bolted as another volley of bullets sprayed into the crowd.

The crowd scattered. Ringer sprinted down the alley, not looking to see whether Hack and the Wyrmthing followed. Glabro, that was safe even with humans watching. Seattle's mist compensated for the rending of the Veil. The speed and strength of the near-man shape more than made up for its added bulk. If he could cut through here and rejoin Rich and Mandy....

Too late. As he leapt over a stack of supercans he heard Hack curse. "Ringer! I'm down, dog." *Can't leave*

'im. Fear gnawed at him, more than one fear. *They'll kill him*. Or worse. With Pentex, there was always a "worse."

They'll kill him and blame it on us.

He was a small man, even in Glabro, and enemies didn't expect muscles on an Asian-American. He turned on the dirty concrete. Three of them. The staff he'd carried he now bore slantwise, facing them ready to parry or trip. "Run, peacemaker. Do you want it now?" called the leader, face invisible under the anarchist's black mask.

"I'll meet you one or all. Come and see how a Child of Gaia fights!" They came all at once then. He tripped the first, heard him slam onto the concrete, then met the silver — *silver!* — they carried, and he Changed, the Crinos taking him. More trouble. Hack moved, at the edge of Ringer's sight, crawling to safety. Was he calling the spirits? Maybe they'd help. The second stabbed at him, raked his side, the mask slipping to show a rotting face with insect mandibles. The agony burned through him. He turned, began a *tabalu-kur*, the staff ripping up under the foe's legs "as the fox bites," and the foe fell to the concrete. But the third was behind him, moving with Garou speed to stab. He twisted, countered with a disarm. The machete fell from the fomor's hands.

Hack lunged, bit at a fomor. Far off, chanting, whistles blowing, music from the protestors. He turned. Hack was crumpled against the wall, curled round his own belly. The fall hadn't hurt him that badly, had it?

"Hey, you okay? Can you walk?" A face changing shape looked up at him. Then down.

"Leave now, my friend." Hack stood, Crinos-huge, eyes glowing with Rage.

"Hack, I'm not gonna leave you here. What in Gaia's name—" His friend interrupted him.

"I have bitten their poison. Their taint is in me. I can feel it. You aren't safe." The fomori were down, unconscious. Probably not dead; they were hard to kill.

"I don't care if you're a Black Spiral now. You're still my friend. Come on, let's find the others." They found the metis carrying two bleeding and concussed Kinfolk to a medical aid station, the med-techs carrying gas masks on their belts with the air of weary veterans. The friends stayed at the medical station for most of the afternoon, wounded and weary, while protests played on and giant puppets enacted Endron's massacre of the Ogoni nation in Nigeria. Finally they left to find Mandy and Joné, who wasn't answering her voicemails. The streets began to empty; cops came by to enforce a curfew and the approaching dark meant that the day in the streets was over. But — wow! Ringer thought. Major success. He didn't have a full report, of course; no one did, but the WTO definitely didn't meet.

Rich and Ringer staggered down the street. Something Wyrm-born had kept Hack's wounds from healing, and a wolf was heavy. Guess he'd be heavier as a two-leg, Ringer thought. A shape blocked his way. Human, though distorted. Hard to see while his eyes stung from leftover tear gas. The other's shape was Glabro, was... a Black Spiral. He crouched, to set Hack on the stones and spring if he had to. Beside him, Rich was bristling, changing into Crinos. "Begone, Wyrm's dinner, or I'll feed you to your Father below!" The bat-eared thing was in Crinos too now, and Ringer tensed, feeling himself Change.

"Now, now, Rich. Hardly a way to address your own father, you know."

Rich stood staring while the bat-eared thing lunged. Ringer moved quickly, instinctively, the staff flickering just so... the werewolf dodged, turned for another charge. "You aren't my father. You are lying."

"Oh? How would I know you if I weren't? See, I've not moved to harm you." Rich roared and charged blindly, and the man slashed at him. "Calm down. I bring an invitation." Ringer moved to cover his packmate, swinging the staff over his head and catching the werewolf on the shoulder.

"From the Wyrm!" Bleeding, Rich honed his claws on the asphalt with scraping sounds. Blank windows looked down on the smoky street. Ringer fenced with the Black Spiral Dancer. Sores and blisters crowded close on his enemy's skin.

"No indeed. From your mother, son. She wishes your company, where the Hive can honor you and your lineage." Ringer saw Rich crying with Rage now, slashing at the Black Spiral, who dodged his blows laughing. "Join your brothers and sisters and we will live not as weaklings fleeing battle but as lords, as Garou ought. You may bring your packmates as well." How well Amanda would like that idea, Ringer thought. The staff clacked between the monster's shins, and Ringer tripped him, rapping him on the wrist with a quick return. Silver rang on pavement.

"Don't. I am not a pacifist." Ringer felt Rage wild, filling him. There was no greater exultation. "Rich, pick up his klaive." He saw his packmate obey.

Mandy and Joné came round the building, saw the Spiral slap aside a klaive-slash, saw Ringer strike and parry. "Want help, brothers?" Mandy shouted.

"Yeah... he's good!" Ringer gasped as the snapping muzzle missed him by a hair's breadth.

"No! Take him alive!" Joné cried. "He might know something! Black Spiral, do you yield?" Rich

reversed the klaive and brought it down on his father's shoulder, felt bones crack under the weight of the pommel.

Mandy joined them with a punch at the huge black werewolf. Ringer struck with the staff, felt less strength in each return blow. Claws slashed him along the ribs. Hack bit into the creature's flank, held to pull him down. Joné hit the creature and eventually the pack had him on the ground. "Do you yield now, Black Spiral?" Its teeth clacked on air inches from Joné's face.

"I yield. Spare me!" It was hardly audible. The thing was in human form now, a Dedicated suit in tatters on the body of a man in his forties. The Rite would have beaten the Rage out of him. His wounds weren't healing, anyway... unless it was some trick. Ringer came closer, staff still held in his right hand, crouched by the not quite stranger. Rich's face was visible in his father's, Ringer thought. The heavy features, coarse red hair going to gray, the same great weather-beaten hands, almost Glabro paws even in human shape. Blood sheeted over the man's face from a slash in his scalp. Ringer touched the man gingerly, ready to jump back if it was some trick. Rich's father groaned as Ringer jarred what looked like a broken collarbone. He and Mandy slowly got the man to his feet, slowly walking (at least he could walk, Ringer thought; the damage to his legs had healed enough before he was forced into breed form) toward a safehouse that Joné had emailed a few blocks off.

"Mason, my name is Mason. Was. Okay?" The not-man's voice was slurred, mouth horribly swollen.

"I... didn't know your name," Rich said. A TV set in a shop window was showing dockworkers in San Diego and Vancouver leaving work because the union protest had been attacked. Good news travels fast, Ringer thought.

"Now," Mandy said to Joné, "you crazy Seeker, you have got yourself a real, honest to Gaia, Black Spiral Dancer. What do you propose to do with him?"

TRIBEBOOK:

CHILDREN of GAIA™

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Contents

Legends of the Garou: Running and Clumping 1
Chapter One: Shoots and Canes (History) 12
Chapter Two: The Grove (Society) 32
Chapter Three: Green and Fallen Leaves (Character Creation) 62
Chapter Four: Flowers and Seeds (Some of the Children) 84

Chapter One: Shoots and Canes

Upstate New York, Summer 1999

The parking lot at Woodstock wasn't pretty; it certainly stripped away the mystique that fading ex-hippies had talked about for the last fifty years. But it looked great after five days of driving. Ringer was glad to see it, glad the wait was almost over. *We'll wait by the corner of the fence; you know what we look like*, she had emailed. His Rich Antler (what a name, Ringer thought!) had emailed a photo taken in his human form; he said that Polaroids of the Crinos never developed right. Hack had taken some of the driving on highways at night, shifted to human. It had let them both get some sleep. "Wake up, dog, we're there." The wolf-head was by his side.

He paid for himself (Hack got into almost everything for free, and thought it very funny) and they walked through the vitamin and incense stands for a while and then down to the corner of the chain-link fence where the spray-painted peace wall stretched in all its particle-board glory. This place was crowded; Joné had said that the moot would be in the Umbra to avoid notice. There were places to step sideways, at least.

The pack that was not yet a pack waited there. Mandy Walters, tall and blonde, Joné Pagliani small, chunky and dark, rising from where she'd sat cross-legged at her laptop, and Rich at a distance, sun through the strands of the fence crisscrossing his face. "Hey, it's Kevin!"

"Sure he's not a ringer? The pod people are awful clever." Joné laughed. Rich moved to stand next to Joné and Mandy. Amanda frowned and looked distracted for a moment, probably consulting the spirits. A breeze blew cool through the concert.

"No, he's one of us. Sorry, Kevin."

"No problem." Handshakes all round. "This is Snow on Hackberries. Hack."

"Good to meet you," growled the not-wolf. "Hack is what he calls me. He is Bell Ringing In An Empty Sky."

"Ringing… Ringer! I knew it!" Joné was smiling.

Ringer was his name from then on. They went back toward the camping area, talking about the drive, and who they were.

"Joné, you really had your First Change online?"

"Yeah," she said as they walked, looking up and smiling. "My webcam was on when some guy tried to

crash my computer, virus and all. Goddamn, good luck Eva — my roommate — was out. I freaked bad, Changed... next thing my dorm room was all smashed up and half the viewers had freaked too, seeing me Change. But a web-spirit was watching too, and got Mandy to come and help. So that was how we met."

"Were you a lost cub?"

"Sort of. We just thought I was Kin or something, I guess. Left school and started WebFarm.... I do okay designing websites for money and it lets me set my own hours. And work pretty much anywhere. I run WyrdWolf now, which is the site where we met, and I run a secure chat board for Garou and Kin. A prime number-spirit, Mersenne, runs it and doesn't let anyone on who isn't, you know, like us. And keeps it anonymous; that was one of his conditions." The pack walked onto the concrete airstrip and instantly felt the heat that piled up over it. Horrible, Ringer thought, like a wet oven. A wonder the humans here weren't really bad-tempered. Yet.

"Prime numbers?" Ringer had passed math, sort of....

"You know, numbers that can only be divided by themselves. He's a pretty sweet guy, Mersenne — likes a gal with a brain, likes keeping secrets, and damn, he's good at it. Had a couple of crackers come after WyrdWolf, but we're safe."

"Yeah, mine was a lot crazier. My dad's car slipped on some ice; he's a terrible driver, and four cars and a schoolbus piled up. I... was the Crinos. I tore the car apart, got my dad and my two brothers out. Fuel spilled — I got kids out of the bus too, some of 'em, before it caught." He shook his head. "The Uncles came but I already knew that I was Garou... it just made sense; nobody had to tell me. The sept said that it was some kind of wonderful blessing: that I saved lives when I first Changed, not taking them. Maybe so. It was just scary and fucked when it happened." They passed through the fencing to the camping area. Mulch material covered the ground in the warm sun.

"No fires, no grills, no nothing, they said. This sucks." Rich was evidently a sour-tempered man but Ringer felt the same.

"No shade either." There were three trees, all of them claimed already. It was like camping on a frying pan. The group next to them had a hibachi set up between their two tents, so evidently not everyone was following orders.

The pack set up tents that Mandy had brought and rested a while. The usual camping-in-the-afternoon feeling had set in: tired, no sleep, stale and a little sweaty in the tent. A band was already playing at the stage set up at the end of the old airstrip.

Mandy poked her head into the tent that Kevin and Hack had put their rucksacks into. "There's a storytelling contest in the council ring at sunset. Do you want to come?"

"Sure. Are we eating before then?"

"Yeah, uh... there's a stir-fry place in the merchant area. That okay?"

"Sure. Hack can eat—."

"I can eat whatever he eats. If I have to I'll eat it with my *hands*." Mandy left.

"Look, I'm just trying to make sure you get something you're going to want."

"I'm half human. I might not like broccoli and tofu but they do keep me going. It's okay. No game here anyway."

They ate and headed for the council ring. The step sideways was easy in the shimmer of a saran-wrap "peace maze" set up near the gate of the camping area.

The Umbral landscape was quieter, a bonfire blazing merrily in a meadow near the huge Weaver-wrapped mess of the old air force base's buildings.

Ringer wondered briefly, an Ahroun's thought, about how thorough the assembled tribe members had been in checking out the great ruined pile in the real world or the Shadow. Surely someone had investigated—

"I am Justice Like Great Waters, Philodox of the Ten Hands Sept. Honor to Mother Gaia and her Chosen, the Garou." Justice was a black woman with gray hair under a turban and a long robe. She held a speaking staff in her left hand. "Tonight we remember the past, and more: to know the Was is to prepare for the future. Any who wishes may tell a tale tonight, but the tale may last only as long as one log takes to burn—."

"And no cement logs, all you Ragabash!" shouted Joné, as Garou laughed.

"The tales may be of present, past or time to come. Paws-That-Refreshes, Ragabash of my sept, bids me say that there will be a boon for the one telling the oldest tale. What this boon is, he will not say."

Justice was walking across the council ring to where an elder sat with hand raised. Helios sank behind veils of clouds in the shadow-sky.

"I acknowledge Pearl-of-the-River of the Hand of Gaia Caern." She handed him the speaking staff and an Asian-American woman rose and put a log on the fire, her forty-five years showing in stiff back and gray-streaked hair. She turned and began speaking.

The War of the Apocalypse

"This is the oldest tale. It is about today. It's about yesterday too."

"You all should know my friend True Silverheels; for those that don't, I'll introduce him. He is a Half Moon from my sept, a leader even for a tribe of bickerers like us, and a true hero.

"He saw that the Children were divided. Homid against lupus, arguing about what peace was. Demeter's Daughters against the Imminent Strike, arguing over how to fight the Evil One. Angels in the Garden versus the Patient Deed over how to help the lost children. The Children were riven into nine camps! There was no oneness in feeling or purpose. Small wonder, he thought, that the Stargazers had left the Garou Nation. True held an Allmoot, the Last Allmoot it was called, and spoke to them at the Hand of Gaia Caern, not far from here. Hear his words.

'I speak only for myself; that is all anyone can do. I am myself, and that is all I can be. We are all brothers and sisters from the same Mother, this.' He touched the ground. 'We chose ages past to follow the path of peace, to unite the tribes. Now we cut ourselves into pieces, camp from camp, camp hating camp. Even when we do not fight, our division cripples us and makes us seem weak and foolish to the Garou who mock us; we should be examples to them, not a laughingstock.'

'We must *remember* Gaia.'

'We must abandon the camps and factions, abandon all divisions in this most divided of tribes. I call upon all who belong to camps to put their camp away, to strike the tent before the Apocalypse strikes the world. Your disagreements are less then your Garou blood, for they belong only to you, while the Garou legacy belongs to all. Realize and recognize differences. But don't let them sever you from another Child of Gaia. Your beliefs about the Apocalypse, your beliefs about violence, the honors you pay to spirits or gods — they are yours. The struggle to save Gaia is ours. If you have been given special Gifts and rites by the spirit-allies of your faction, I call upon you to teach them to anyone of Rank and honor who merits them, regardless of camp status. Our Gifts, our fetishes and caerns, we must share wisely; each division is a victory for the Fallen. I lay this blessing upon you. Until the Children are one, there will never be another Allmoot. This earth divided....'"

"We will make whole," the crowd replied.

Ringer nodded; he'd heard the Children repeat this blessing many times. Pearl went on.

"The Children heard his words, urging them to forget the divisions of camps and to unite, to show the Garou Nation that the Children, the bringers of peace, could stop fighting at least among themselves, that the teachers of harmony could practice what we preached. So that's why the camps no longer meet, no longer hold themselves separate. That's why ritemasters now teach almost anyone who can qualify any of the Gifts and rites."

She sighed. "For the most part, that is. Not everyone listened. Some still talk the old camp-talk... it will pass, one way or another. I have said enough."

Whooee, Ringer thought. *That guy had the stones! To tell a bunch of humans off like that was bad enough — but these were Garou! True called for an end to factions. Some of us listened. Maybe I can help. I don't know.*

The 1960s

"It sucks being a Child of Gaia!" Rich complained. "Other tribes don't trust us, and we can't even agree on what we actually want to *do!*"

Mandy said, "Yeah, it doesn't help that we saw actual progress in the 1960s."

"You think success spoiled us?" queried Joné.

"I'd say that was what happened. Look, we were all through the civil rights movement; my dad pulled a guy away from a lynch mob one time after the Klan caught them passing out leaflets on voting rights. Free Speech movement was the same — look at Summer Robinson and what she's done for us all these years." Ringer nodded; Summer was a survivor with style. "Humans got laws passed that honored the Earth, mandated rights for more people—"

"Still left *me* out," Ringer said, sitting by the man he couldn't marry.

"The Left got as much done as it could, maybe, then threw it all away on the drugs and stupid hippie crap. Rock and roll was cool and it still is, but it didn't help anyone get jobs or places to live, protection from discrimination. The parties, sure, they were great. My Uncle Nathan used to do the Mineshaft, back in the seventies, and he says Garou would come into the leather room or the dungeon and just shapeshift at will; the leathermen were so drugged they didn't even care. Drugs... look, I hate the laws too. But I hate people fucking up their lives and their brains even more. A friend of my dad's OD'd when I was seven, a Garou friend. Damn, it took a lot of smack to burn out a werewolf, but it was a total, stupid, evil waste of someone's life. I just think that first, we stopped doing stuff that was helping and started to do shit that made everyone mad and didn't help anyone. Yeah, Garou and Kin went to war protests, helped draft resisters by

giving them conscientious objector jobs, stuff like that. But the other tribes and their Kin started seeing us as a bunch of wasted beatniks… then in the 1970s American society started getting more and more conservative and no one cared. So it looks like a lot of the gains just melted away. And we aren't innocent. You don't just get something and have it forever. You gotta take care of it and guard it. And we didn't."

"You think the 1960s radicals are to blame for the 1970s, for segregation in fact, for the rise of the religious right, for the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*, union-busting, all that?" Ringer was curious.

"Yeah… kinda. Maybe. I mean, look at the '90s, when the basic idea of political correctness — which, at its heart, was nothing more complicated than 'try to consider the feelings of those different than you' — got pushed too far, and then a backlash hit. 'PC' became a dirty word; suddenly the 'cool' thing to do was to show that you weren't ruled by political correctness by busting out all the crap talk. Thanks to too-zealous liberals, the anti-political correctness movement became cool — hell, it was all the rage to refer to women as whores — pardon, 'hos' — and bitches! I mean, can't you see something's *wrong* with that?

"So yeah, I think the same thing might have happened. The moderates stopped listening to what the radicals had to say, because the radicals proved they had no interest in moderation. And it was kind of the same with us. We didn't consolidate our gains, and a lot of us stopped caring. But not everyone.… Summer again. She never gave up, never burned out. She can inspire anyone; I don't know how. As discouraged as I get, she's all it takes." Mandy looked as if she was about to weep. Joné put a hand on the older woman's arm.

"Yeah… yeah, I'm okay. Maybe this wasn't a story," she said gesturing to where two Ragabash were regaling the circle with a sharp-edged tale of '60s LSD trips, "but it was *about* something. Okay?"

"Yeah, thanks for telling us. It's okay. We know how you feel, Mandy." Ringer wrapped his arm round Mandy's shoulders, broader than his own. "You're doing the right thing. It's okay."

Time, Ringer thought, as No-Moons capered though the tale of brown acid and rock music at Woodstock. *Time eats what we believe, what we are. Time takes; does it ever give?*

The World Wars

A lean, corded man with long hair gone prematurely white and deep scars across his arms accepted the staff with one hand and dropped another log on the fire with the other. Ringer suddenly focused again, realizing he'd missed the new speaker's name.

"We all talk of peace, and how best to achieve it. I come to talk of the alternative. I speak of war — of the wars that have fed Beast-of-War until it is bloated with power. Not our war — we have been fighting to end the struggle against the Enemy with healing touch and sharpened claw since the birth of the race. And not of all human wars — there aren't enough logs within a mile to fuel the fire that long. I speak of the two World Wars, the wars nobody could escape.

"You all know the basic story of World War II. Human children learn about Nazis, of tank battles and bombing runs and Axis and Allies." His eyes narrowed. "As Garou, we know what war is better than any human. We know what happens to anyone unlucky enough to even stand too near a war. This was no different — the scale was simply larger.

"Scientists vivisected human beings. Japanese soldiers placed Chinese women in rape camps. Guns slew soldiers and civilians indiscriminately. Planes dropped bombs on schools, houses, libraries. Soldiers killing and raping with no thought for nationality. And the final end to the war came only when America managed to develop the most destructive weapon the world had ever seen, and obliterated two ordinary towns for the crime of being on the wrong side."

He paused, turning his gaze across the circle of listeners. "*That* is war. That is the worst in humanity, and everything we fight against. And everything that we — not we as a tribe, but we as a people, as relatives of the human race — failed to prevent from happening. I've been to Atrocity, and to the Battleground. I've seen these things first-hand. It's enough to make a Fenrir sick. It's even enough to make one lose all hope in ever achieving peace for the world, for even a generation's time.

"But listen: World War II could have, maybe, been prevented. You see, an ex-house painter from Austria probably couldn't have risen to the same sort of power if his audience hadn't been particularly receptive at the time. Germany was hurting the time that the National Socialist Party started coming into being. It was hurting because after World War I, the French had argued for laying severe economic sanctions on Germany, to make sure that nothing like the Great War would ever happen again. Right motivation, wrong idea. Those sanctions made life harder in Germany than it had to be, punishing everyone alike, regardless of whether they'd been for or against the war. So when this insane little man and his elite started offering a potential way for the nation to get back what had been taken from them, there were more people listening than might otherwise have been.

"Turn the other cheek." His eyes glittered like glass in the firelight. "It's not always practical, and sometimes it's not even right — those that are ill beyond healing, and will hurt others if left alone to do so, people like that can't be forgiven." An undercurrent of angry muttering rippled around the campfire, but Justice made no gesture to stop the scarred man's story. "But World War II just goes to show you that you need to temper punishment with mercy, or you could be causing more harm than you prevent. The abused child becomes the abuser. I think we've all seen the truth of that statement somewhere.

"Of course, that's part of what put France on that path to begin with. They talk more about World War II than World War I, and there are more movies about it — but it wasn't any cleaner a war. The death and disease that plagued the trenches, the mustard gas destroying young men from the inside out — the Great War was humanity at its worst, just like its successor. The sanctions that primed Germany may have been too much, but they were inspired by pure horror."

His voice was low against the fire, but nobody made a sound. "If nothing else, these two wars are proof that our duty is a sacred one. If we all have to give our lives to prevent something like the World Wars from happening again, it'll be a small price. We have to be better than the humans were. We have to treat our defeated foes with enough mercy to keep them from rising again — but we *cannot* lose to them. Too much is at stake." He relinquished the staff, stepped down.

"Who was *that* guy?" Ringer's voice was a whisper.

"Ivan Two-Moon." Mandy's voice was just as soft. "They say he was born under an eclipse, that he thinks kind of like an Ahroun and kind of like a Ragabash. And he was Imminent Strike; somehow I doubt he gave up his focus on warcraft when True made his call for unity." She laced her fingers together, rested her chin on them. "Even Unicorn has sharp hooves."

The American West

The staff was passed to a new speaker, a slight black woman with long braids announced as End-of-Sorrow.

"I hate to follow one tale of war and suffering with another, but just like Ivan—" she paused and nodded to the previous speaker, who returned the gesture— "I figure there are some things that need to be told. Don't worry too much, though; my story's about something

that should be celebrated as well as something that should be regretted.

"Some folks call it the Shame of the Nation — a period of time so shameful, the Garou Nation wouldn't even speak openly of it for a time. Oh, the Uktena and Wendigo would talk about it, but they didn't do so that often at multitribal moots, because nothing frustrates Garou more than a reminder of their failures.

"You all know that the 1800s saw a lot of colonization in North America — colonization of the sort that quietly ignored the fact that an indigenous people had already set up their own 'colonies' in the area. Fighting broke out, of course, and the Garou pitched in on either side. The Fianna and the Get of Fenris were the worst for demanding the rights to lands that weren't theirs, and the Uktena and Wendigo didn't just roll over and give them what they wanted. It was like the War of Rage all over again — hell, in part of the West, it was still going on — but this time, it was werewolf against werewolf. No sorrier state of affairs has ever plagued our race. Now, our tribe got involved, of course, and to our eternal shame, some of them picked sides instead of working to stop the fighting. However, I'm damn proud to relate that many others did what they could to reconcile the two sides, and in a few places, it worked.

"All this conflict and caern-raiding, though, escalated the war. Always does. The American Indian nations had a tradition of warring with each other, now, and they weren't above torture as a way of dealing with captives. But the kind of fighting that rolled across the West, the treachery of fighting with disease-infected trade goods and army massacres, that awakened something else. A spirit the size of a mountain and wicked as the Wyrm itself, called the Storm Eater. This thing fed not only on the Wyrm-energies released by the atrocities of the land, but also on the Weaver-spirits following the railroads and even on the Wyld-spirits themselves. Nothing, it seemed, could stop it!

"But — and I said there was something to celebrate about this story — there was hope. The Storm Eater brought together all thirteen tribes out of necessity; they didn't like working together, but they did it anyway. And all thirteen tribes lost one of their greatest heroes when they performed the Rite of Still Skies — a sacrifice shared equally, another binding component. We made our own sacrifice there, too, a woman who I have the distinct honor to call my great-great-great-great-grandmother, Gaia rest her soul.

"So you see, in the end the Garou Nation joined up as thirteen, when for a while it was looking like the eleven would wipe out the other two. We know the Stargazers have left us for a while, but I say remember this story and take heart; when the need is truly there, we will be one again."

The Enlightenment

"I recognize Burke Checks-and-Balances, of the Ten Hands Sept," Justice said as a man in a polo shirt and denim shorts got up and put a log on the fire. He looked to be about fifty.

"Who's that, Newt Gingrich?" Joné asked.

"He's from one of the old families... very conservative in a lot of ways. Philodox for his sept, and published a few pieces of constitutional scholarship too." The dignified Half Moon began to speak.

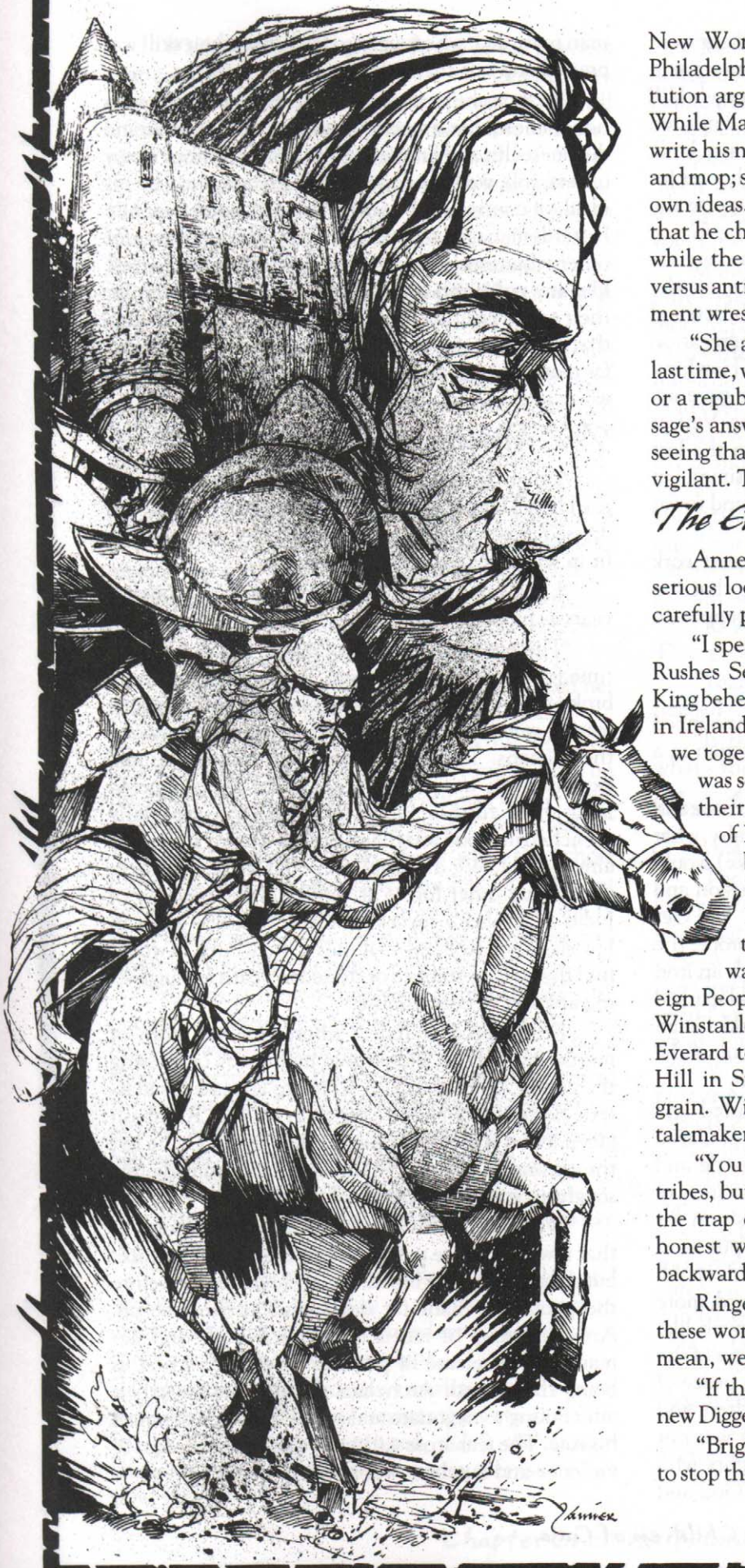
"I will tell you tonight of the glorious deeds of our ancestors: not the ancestors of one or several of you, but of all who share the Gaian ideals of democracy, self-determination, and the rights of all people.

"Now, you have heard that these were our ideas, that we inspired the humans, guided them. Not so simple. Humans do outnumber us, you know, and they are pretty creative. They are the makers and unmakers of their own history; the Rage that fuels our battle strength also prevents us from drawing too close to humanity, from taking positions of power among them. But we are more than spectators, parasites or victims. When we bend ourselves to subtlety, we can use Gaia's gifts to support and aid humans from time to time. The eighteenth century was one of those times.

"The Allmoot we held in Switzerland in 1754 was the source of the Law of Nature Accord, in which we vowed to support the new ideas of the era: physiocracy, democracy, a free market. These ideals would, we hoped, create a freer and more open society. No, we didn't invent them, but we saw an opportunity to promote them. A discussion with a market fruit seller, a book left on a leader's tea-table, a sermon or salon attended by a few chatty ladies — all can do a lot to bring the right ideas to the right people. The physiocrats, French minister and Kinsman Jacques Necker among them, in their Gaian emphasis that all wealth came from the earth, and that said wealth could be created, not simply stolen. This was a new idea, you know.

"The North American colonies were loyal in 1760, and in 1775 were demanding complete independence; much of this was due to pamphlets that ordinary people could afford to buy and read, whereas books were expensive. Check some of those pamphlets out sometime: there you will find ideas of justice, freedom and self-rule that Gaians and Kin had preserved for long, waiting for the day when they could flower again.

"Mary M'Ginnis was not the least among the Gaians who spoke out. Author of three pamphlets on the need to abolish the class laws of old England in the



New World, she worked as a cleaning woman in Philadelphia while the fifty-five framers of the Constitution argued and debated to create the new nation. While Madison stayed after the daylong meetings to write his notes and tidy up his papers, she would sweep and mop; she listened to his complaints and offered her own ideas. I would like to think it was not for nothing that he changed his mind on several important issues while the Convention raged around him, Federalist versus anti-Federalist, a half dozen schemes for government wrestling like gladiators.

"She asked Ben Franklin, as he left the hall for the last time, whether he had given the people a monarchy or a republic. 'A republic, if you can keep it,' was the sage's answer. Mary and her sept persist to this day in seeing that we do, for it is my sept now, and still we are vigilant. That's the price of our freedoms."

The English Civil War

Anne Plows-the-Sea was a small woman with a serious look, brown hair pulled back in a braid. She carefully placed a log atop two others and began:

"I speak of Brightness Falls, Galliard of the Green Rushes Sept in England. The Civil War raged, the King beheaded; Europe ravaged by slaughter, the Fianna in Ireland bleeding so under Cromwell that they and we together feared the Apocalypse was come. Food was so costly that workers could not eat the bread their hands had made. Men starved in the streets of London; the rich fled to Virginia or died in battle. The Green Rushes Sept saw the suffering of the poor, humans, our Kin, and the Bone Gnawers and determined to take action to make a new commonwealth. If there was no King, they reckoned, then the sovereign People must rule, as in ancient Athens. Gerrard Winstanley, Kin to the sept, and its Philodox Will Everard took twenty Garou and Kin to St. George's Hill in Surrey, and dug the common land to plant grain. With them went Brightness Falls, singer and talemaker, and the story comes from her.

"You hear boasts of battles and wars from many tribes, but this was true heroism. To spring men from the trap of money and class, to feed the poor with honest work. On that hill we took the first steps backward to living in harmony with the Mother."

Ringer wondered why no history class spoke of these women and men. "Mandy, were these people, I mean, were they, like, a commune?"

"If that's how you want to think of 'em, yeah. The new Diggers in San Francisco sure were." Her eyes shone.

"Brightness Falls was there when the soldiers came to stop the Diggers, and she sang to them of peace. The

Diggers put up no resistance and the soldiers went away. Their numbers increased as the Gnawers sent Kin from the slums of London. The St. George's Hill colony lasted almost a year and the Diggers built ten more settlements, always taking common waste land, manuring and working it to yield food and homes for the poor. The landowners sent thugs to disperse the colonies, but Brightness Falls convinced the Garou not to Rage, which would have ended only in everyone dying. The landlords' bullies finally broke up the original colonies. In the end Winstanley withdrew and spent the rest of his life as a Quaker; his congregation later became the Forest Brethren, Raymond Hawkins' church. Everard and Brightness Falls never gave up. The historians forgot them, which was the Veil at work, but the Diggers' colonies lived on, in the lost 'green lanes' of England. Many places, many times, but always the same work: to plant Gaia's body and to eat Her bounty with all shared among all."

Ringer remembered his mother and her quiet work in the garden. How could anyone doubt that that was Gaia's work too? Maybe he'd put some chili peppers in at the caern....

The Age of Faith

"Might-For-Right, you may speak," announced Justice as she handed the staff to a small woman in a Renfaire T-shirt and jeans.

"I am Might-for-Right of the Sept of Tolerance and I speak of the Gaian heroes of the Age of Chivalry, what some of our tribe (she darted a glance at Burke) would call the Dark Ages. This was a time of confusion and violence; in other words, heaven for Garou! The Get and Fianna reveled in epic battles all over Europe; the Fangs waged war and ruled their peasants with an iron grip, the Talons slew humans almost at will and sparked a millennium of werewolf hunts. In such a world, Gaian ideals of peace and love were pretty much out of the picture. That's where Tree-of-Battles came in.

"He was a Gaian whom the Fangs trusted and admired because of his immense knowledge of Garou and spirit lore, and served as a herald in battle and tourney. Inspired by the almost Gaian Christianity of Francis of Assisi, he decided to use his position for good. The bloody-minded warlords would put arms aside to hear his recounting of the heroes' deeds of old. But he did more than repeat what he had heard, more than other taletellers who made a hero as much like their patron as they could. His tales were always of the noble knights, those men who observed the peace of God — that meant not killing women, children, and the clergy — and the Truce of God, which was not fighting on holy days. He praised the knights who refused to kill a defeated foe, whose mercy God and man rewarded, who fought so fairly that their skill was praised and not their trickery.

"In short, he promoted the ideal of the knight as an honorable soldier, a man of virtue and decency. Bertrand du Guescelin and Enguerrand de Coucy, among many others, followed his code. Not everyone lived by his ideal, of course. And horribly enough, some absolute bastards managed to use some of the ideals as cover for other violations — such as the *droit de seigneur* — just like any politician using public relations to cover for their actual business. But still, some *did* try to live up to that ideal; even to try was worthy of praise and he did far more. His life and death are proof that even in the worst settings, our ideas can find an audience."

The Roman Empire

A man announced to be David Living-Walls of the High Temple sept threw a log into the fire. He was dressed in ceremonial robes and jewelry, which oddly fit in with the festival at Woodstock.

"I will tell a tale older still, older by a thousand years as humans count time.

"The age of the Roman Empire was not a good time for the Children of Gaia. Petronius, damn him, broke the Veil in that book of his and started Europe fearing werewolves again. Things were worse among the humans. The Empire itself was militaristic and expansionist; unrest and resentment in conquered lands bred further violence. One land especially drenched in blood was Judea, of which many stories are already told. We did what we could there, but there were many other forces at work and the memory of Judas Maccabee's successful revolt still was fresh in Jewish — and Roman! — minds. Often, our Kin would find themselves stabbed or stoned to death for suggesting any sort of compromise.

"King Herod of Judea, whose rule was born of murder in 37 B.C., didn't help matters by oppressing the people while glorifying Rome to appease his masters. Better to be Herod's pig than his son, Ragabash gibed, but it was true! When he died in 4 B.C., he left the throne to his son, Archelaus, who immediately sought to soothe the minds of the people.

"We had tried to convince the rebels around us that it was a chance to begin anew and work for peace, but they were out for blood. As Archelaus stood before the people, a chant for death and justice rose up. Another group of rebels took the Temple and demanded the release of prisoners. Seeing his rule as being threatened, Archelaus slaughtered the rebels after failing to negotiate and sailed for Rome to affirm his rule. The fear arose within us that another reign of violence and butchery was about to begin.

"While we had no love for Rome or the Leeches that controlled it, their direct rule was looking very appealing by contrast. As corrupt as it was, it was still a civilization with laws and with that came at least a measure of stability. After conferring with our Silent Strider companions in the sept, we sent a group of our Kin and some leading Judean citizens to appeal to Emperor Augustus for direct rulership of the land. Rome's Glass Walkers ensured that the message came to him by day, when the vile Leeches had less power in that Wyrm-ridden city.

"Initially, the kingdom was split between the disputed parties until Archelaus proved himself to be incompetent. The butcher was banished to Gaul and Judea came under direct Roman control. For better or for worse, we had gotten what we wanted.

"While some have disputed how wise or peaceful an action this was, remember whom was assigned as governor in 21 A.D.; Pontius Pilate. Our actions seemed right at the time, but their aftereffects have long been argued and discussed. I can only hope that in the very End that it turns out to be the correct one."

"What was that about?" Hack asked.

"Jesus. Know about him, right?" Joné stroked her wolf-friend's back. Hack's tail thumped pleasure.

"Sure I know who Jesus is. I watch TV, don't I?" The wolf pulled himself into human form to carry on the conversation. "And I know Pontius Pilate — how Jesus died and all. But who was Jesus? I mean, really?"

"Wish I knew. I mean, that's what the whole history of the Christian Church is all about. Whether he was man, God, proceeded from the Father, son of the Father, spirit, flesh, fiction, fact... maybe he's whatever you make of him."

"He was a Gaian — not literally, in all likelihood, but part of our spirit whether he knew it or not. You know he was — where can you find our ideas better than the Sermon on the Mount. 'Congratulations to the peacemakers,' 'The meek shall inherit the earth,' all that. Nonviolence, turn the other cheek, share your belongings." Mandy was lecturing again.

"Pity Christians don't do as he said."

"Pity more of them don't do as he did is more like it," muttered Rich angrily.

"The Church of Gaia basically takes his ideas and applies them in a Gaian way — you guys have seen us at the caern." Ringer had attended services a couple of times, not really getting the point.

Joné said, "Yeah, you guys work for social justice too. I know the guy that manages the website." *Who on the Web*, Ringer wondered, *didn't this woman know? Maybe the chicks on the porno sites; she didn't seem the type.*

"My sister, you know, she's off with her husband doing development work in India. You met them before they left, Rich, the skinny guy with the big dark eyes. Remember?"

Joné went on, "So what does Jesus, Jesus Christ, mean to you, Mandy? I mean, do you get all crazy-weepy and stuff over religion? I'm not making fun of you, I just want to know."

Mandy seemed to be choosing her words carefully. "He was a great man, the greatest. He told us the most important things ever: love each other, care for each other, do right. I know he was, he is, the most important teacher of righteousness who ever lived. Whether he was God, or a god, I don't know. No one knows. We can only believe. And the most incredible thing about him is that we Garou, as hard as we try, we can't live up to his example, not with Gnosis, Gifts and fetishes. But there's something even more amazing. That maybe, just maybe, he wasn't magic, wasn't a spirit or a god, just a man. And that even then, what he said, what he did, stays with us always. He stays with us always. So there, No-moon, is your answer. That good enough for you?"

"Yeah," Joné almost whispered. "Thanks a lot. I needed that."

"Is this serious enough?" Hack asked. "Mandy, what's the next story about?"

Greek Nights

Amanda spoke:

"The Children had it pretty good in ancient Greece. Okay, women had it rough in Athens, but they had more rights in Sparta than anywhere else in the ancient world. We sat in on a lot of art and philosophy; the Greeks listened to us as they did to anyone. We would have outright flourished there, except for one small difficulty — it was the homeland of another tribe, who wasn't particularly thrilled with the thought of sharing their lands with an entire other tribe. You can't really blame them for being territorial — they're werewolves, after all — but it would have been nice.

"Hell, they still call the Mother Gaia! The city-states fought all the time, but what better place for peacemakers? Yeah, Ringer, I see you laughing — it was great back then if you liked men, too. Unfortunately, it was also great if you liked underage boys — don't scowl, Ringer, it's true — but we're not really here to talk about social ills we couldn't do anything about. We're here to talk about our successes, our biggest battles, the things that give us hope in this age.

"Ctesias of Cnidos was a Child of Gaia and a doctor. Like so many of us, he followed Asklepios, the healer-spirit. He went to Greece's enemy, Persia, and

worked for Darius, the Shah, as a personal physician and bodyguard. When Darius and Cyrus fought at Cunaxa, Cyrus broke through the guard of the Shah and wounded Darius himself; the Shah would have died save for Ctesias' healing Gifts.

"By and by Darius died and Ctesias returned to Cnidus in Greece. He wrote a history of Persia and a history of India. In the twenty-fifth section, he was the first writer to describe Unicorn; wild unicorns were still around back then. He sired four Kin and died an old man.

"Ctesias speaks to us sometimes in moots. His bravery and his willingness to extend Gaia's blessings even to his people's enemies make him a hero to us. Would that more were like him today.

Babylon

Justice-Like-Great-Waters frowned as woman wearing a "Jesus Saves" T-shirt approached with a cement log. At Justice's command, she put the prop down and picked up an arm's length of slash pine from a woodpile. This also gave a good view of the back of her shirt: "But Gretzky rebounds, and he scores!"

She threw the log in and announced, "Hi! I'm Shelly from the Hanging Moon sept. I've got a great story for you!" Justice had a look of worry on her face.

"This is about the Ragabash Mocking Demons. At least that's what we're told her name was. It changes every now and again. Anyway, this is the tale of her sojourn to the vile, corrupted city of Babylon."

Unsettled murmuring began around the fire, but she still continued. "Now in its early days, Babylon looked like it would be the new Sumeria. There was Hammurabi codifying laws and civilization flowering in ways that promoted stability and peace. Unfortunately, the guiding hand we offered was basically severed by demons that had overtaken the city's power structure. We were driven out and could only watch on from beyond the city walls, trying ever and again to return and help the populace inside.

"These demon worshippers ruled the city with a cold hand; they made regular human sacrifices on the top of their temple and things worse than Leeches prowled the night. The Children felt pain for the people who were suffering, but even the mages who lived there and once wielded so much power couldn't kick the demons and their worshippers out.

"However, a Ragabash named Mocks Demons managed to enter the city without being detected. Alone in a city full of evil, she did the only thing that a lone Ragabash could; tell clever lies. Her lies were about the ancient friends of Babylon , the Children of Gaia, who remained hidden in the city, fighting demons when they could and saving people on the streets. They were united and waited for the people to get behind them to throw the evil out.

"Mocks Demons did a lot to make this rumor true; she fought the night stalkers and saved a lot of people who spread more stories. Eventually she was hunted and killed, but her sacrifice had given life to Children in Babylon who were not really there. People began standing up for themselves and a little hope returned to the beaten down multitudes. There were even mobs of humans whose faith enabled them to turn back the demon-things.

"Eventually it was a band of mages who threw the demons and their worshippers out, but they would never have done it without the support of a heartened populace. While the Children were never able to free Babylon, Mocks Demons' courage, sacrifice and little lies were instrumental. To Mocks Demons, and the power of rumor!"

Everyone drank.

Crete

Ringer admired the wiry little man in gym shorts and a USS *Michener* T-shirt who strode into the council ring. Tough-looking, with tattoos wreathing his arms and a handsome narrow face. "Who's he?"

Joné said, "That's Soldier-of-Paradise, the No-Moon. Didn't know he was back from the Persian Gulf so soon. Only Garou I know with the nerve to join the Gaia-damned Navy." The man poured something onto the fire and watched it flare up while people laughed.

"He's in the military? A *Child of Gaia*? Why?"

She grinned. "Lost cub — I think he might have some Bone Gnawer in him; his instructor in boot camp was Kin. Stayed in to struggle for just warfare, peacekeeping, stuff like that. Goddamn Ragabash tried to get us all to join up! I mean, sure; like none of the rest of us have problems with Rage. One thing's for sure: he's not preaching to the choir like we are! He said once that there was nowhere that needed Unicorn's touch more than the military. It does make a kind of sense." Ringer caught wanting and regret in the young woman's eyes as she looked at the man who had just placed a log on the fire.

"Thought you were into nonviolent social change... or are you into him?"

"He does do a wicked James Bond impression... no. And you're SOL too; he's married and has a kid."

"Oh. What did he pour on the fire?"

"Bad whiskey."

Soldier-of-Paradise spoke in a flat Southern drawl:

"I'm Ragabash for the Water Margin Sept and I'm a fire controlman on the Navy destroyer *James Michener*. My tale comes to me from a history teacher who sailed with our ship to Arabia, Crete and Spain; while we saw the Palace at Knossos he told us about a big fuckin' lie.

"The Minoans, Crete, long time ago. They were a kewl civilization, trading spices and resins with Egypt and sending to Greece for lumber and slaves. They were also savage, gloomy and cruel. The 'Palace' at Knossos has no traces of fire, the teacher said, no windows or light. It was a house of the dead, y'all, not a place to party. There the rot-king Minos ruled in the dark long after his spirit had departed, tied onto his throne with a roomful of dead bigshots.

Dr. Stirling — he was Kin to some tribe I don't know — had enough of the Sight to look beyond the museum's lies and see Asterion. He was the last of the moon-bulls, after the Wars of Rage. They tried to breed 'em back, but no dice; the only way they could work a breeding program for the aurochs — which are to cattle as wolves are to dogs, just so you know — was to domesticate 'em. And domestication kills the shapeshifter blood.

"But they had one. The Apis was trapped in a maze; they fed him a buncha human sacrifices, shipped in from Athens. Asterion was a crazy sonofabitch too, all by himself. He was pretty fuckin' sick there at the end, killin' em just because he could. Some human dude came and did him, but it wasn't like he had anything to live for. The bull-man barely put up a fight.

"Y'all probably know the lies: that the guy that killed him was some big hero with a ball of yarn, that the Minoans were a fuckin' happy land with equal rights for women, all that sunshiney kinda crap. The lesson here is, don't believe everything they tell you, especially if it's a drunk sailor like me." He paced away from the fire.

"So... uh, what was that all about?" Ringer had missed the point.

"Minoan Crete. The perfect Gaian civilization, so some say. Apparently there are... differences of opinion. Ask him yourself if you want to."

"Well, the Children argue about everything. I guess I'd like to meet the doctor he talked about, the man who told him the story. That place sounds pretty weird."

"Whether the museum is right, or Soldier-of-Paradise is, it was a weird place." Joné cut in. "Oh, and Ringer? He likes Maker's Mark, over ice. Just so you know." The mischief-making smile flashed.

"I thought you said—" But another Garou was rising to speak and the sailor had already disappeared, back to his pack, back to his mate, back to his ship... no knowing.

Sumeria

A weedy guy with a clipboard stood up. "Mother? I have a story that is older." Ringer thought he looked like a graduate student — heavy glasses with black plastic frames and a cropped head of hair that was going bald anyway.

Justice brought him the staff and he said, "I am History of Clay, Theurge for the pack of Hanan Amber-Eyes.

"In ancient Sumeria, mud made the building blocks of civilization and water was its least common ingredient. Humans fought wars over water, especially rivers. We learned the Rite of the Sacred Peace from the spirits and our septs sought to make peace; all too often war came instead. One such war occurred between the cities of Umma and Lagash, but the King of Kish came and set the boundary with a stone marker between them. Lagash got the river.

"Umma was not happy, and as soon as the King of Kish left they ripped down the marker and restarted the war. This battle went back and forth for three generations until another king, Il of Zabalam, swept down to crush the army of Lagash and conquer Umma. Il declared that Lagash owned the river, but Umma could use it free of charge.

"The king of Lagash was not satisfied, and continued to try and raise money for a new war. The King desecrated temple and even caern lands with his farms, seized boats, and raised taxes. If a man divorced his wife, brought his sheep to town for shearing... even for burial there was a tax. 'From one end of Lagash to the other,' wrote Strength of Water, 'there was the taxman.'

"Long had we fought for Lagash, but this was too much. The sept agreed; he should not drive us into the ground for a war we were weary of fighting and that would do us no good. Together we rose up and overthrew the king of Lagash, placing Urukagina the Reformer, Kinsman to the Children of Gaia, as our leader. He ended the flood of taxes, restored land to the temples, and passed laws protecting widows and orphans from powerful neighbors. He brought the vow of sacred peace to Lagash, himself swearing the great Oath in the caern we maintained on temple land.

"Sadly, this was not to last. Eight years later the king of Umma, 'Big Man' Zaggesi, came and defied the sacred peace by conquering Lagash. It was a bitter loss — it was the same bitter loss we have endured so many times. Urukagina chose to promote peace by slowing preparations for war — but Zaggesi had no such interest, and he was simply better prepared for the war that followed. So we are reminded — though we may desire peace, we must still be ready to fight. We are Garou. It is our duty to make war when needed so that others will not have to.

"In his dying breath, though, Urukagina cried 'As for Zaggesi, King of Umma, may his goddess Nidaba bear his mortal sin upon his head.' While the curse was slow in fulfillment, Zaggesi was kept on a dog collar 25 years later as Sargon of the Semites washed his sword in the southern sea. Thus it is for all who would break the sacred peace. No bringer of war dies content."

The Impergium

A gaunt woman with jaundiced eyes stood and threw a log on the fire, though by her appearance it seemed as though the fire would burn her up like a dry twig. "I am Tears of Mercury, of the Gaia's Bounty sept. My story's so old that humans won't even allow themselves to remember it; yet it is so powerful that they can't forget it in their hearts." Her accent, a mix of Irish and Australian, made Ringer think of far lands, far times.

"I'll begin by addressing a little myth that's disturbingly pervasive among our tribe: the whole notion that the Defiler Wyrm invented rape. That's a crock. I don't care if you heard it from a wizened elder who's convinced that rape was a special tool meant to increase humanity's numbers, or a dewy-eyed cub who's sure that humans could never come up with something so vile on their own — it's a lie. Or wishful thinking, more like it. Rape exists outside the human species; it has for a long time. But when someone deliberately causes that kind of suffering and violation to another creature — well, it doesn't take a genius to reason that the Defiler Wyrm gets stronger off that violation. That much is true. But the thought that the Wyrm had to invent rape — no. Don't ever let anyone tell you otherwise. The Banes do not make people do this.

"So, as I was saying, the Defiler Wyrm didn't invent rape, and it wasn't the influence of outside spiritual entities that made humans breed more than they should have. They just *did*. Humanity was simply on top of everything and there was nothing to cull their numbers. That's why there were too many of them. So the real reason the Children were against the Impergium wasn't because culling humanity was the wrong solution. It was because of the bloody manner in which the other Garou went about doing it. They were feeding the Wyrm with their murders and reveling."

Tears, who was now looking much stronger in the firelight, looked about as mumbles of dissatisfaction surrounded her. "To illustrate this point, I'm going to tell you a story about a wolf and a rat. The wolf was one of us, named Patience of Deed, and the rat, well, let us just call him 'the rat.'

"The rat came to Patience of Deed and asked, 'Brother, is it possible to kill with love in one's heart?'

"'It is,' replied Deed. 'But you must be sure it is absolutely necessary. Who is it you must kill?'

"'Humanity.' Deed's eyes grew wide, and the rat quickly added, 'Not all of them! Just enough that there are too few to harm Gaia.'

"'I see, and why are you doing this? Your love for Gaia is admirable, but it is hardly a reason for such a task.'

"'Gaia has asked this of me, brother. So, you of all Gaia's children who truly understands her love, tell me how can I kill Her children with love?"

"Patience of Deed closed his eyes in thought for some time, considering the matter. He knew if Gaia asked it, then it must be done. He then responded, 'Eat their food. When it is low, they are less likely to breed. Spread disease when this is not enough, so that they can pass away in their sleep. Since this is the will of Gaia, you must make it such that they see it as the will of Gaia.'

"And with that the rat left and began to do his duty. When the Garou took this responsibility from the rat and began the Impergium, we didn't object because we were opposed to the culling of humanity, but because it was done in a wantonly violent and bloody fashion. The will of Gaia is always the way of love, no matter how hard it is for us to comprehend this."

"Is that *true*?" Joné asked.

"Well," Mandy, mused, "the Children of the Rat have always eaten away at humans... there's truth enough to it. I think it's a bit much to assume it was one of us that told us how to do their jobs, but y'know, I guess the Ratkin probably used to gather around campfires and talk about how they taught us to do *our* jobs. So fair's fair." She chuckled, then her face became more serious. "But she didn't tell how the Impergium ended! That was Lore-Speaker Gron's work. When he-she—"

"He-she? What was this person, a drag queen?" Ringer was briefly amused.

"No, something greater. He-she was metis, and a hermaphrodite."

"A what?" asked Hack.

"Gron was both male and female, at once Arm, Voice and Heart of the Great Mother of All. He-she traveled to each sept of the Children, to all places under the sky. Gron saw that the Garou were not Gaia's only defenders! Humans, Kin and otherwise, lived, farmed, built and worshiped in ways that aided the Mother. When humans fired the forest, it grew back thicker, greener. When they hunted, they killed the weak and sick, strengthening the herds. And they did more. In the caves of Gaul he-she saw carvings and paintings honor-

ing Gaia; by the rivers of Thessaly humans made statues of the fish spirits, making them real as no chant could do. For the rest of his-her life Gron worked to lift the great ban, to allow some humans to increase their numbers. But on the night of the Allmoot where the speakers announced the change, Gron died. Murdered by mad Talons, some say, while the Talons themselves claim the Mother struck him dead... no one knows. Dying, he-she bade his packmates carry him to the council ring, wounds reopening, to hear the speeches. The council agreed to lift the Impergium and Gron saw runners depart to all septs of the Garou, knowing his-her goal achieved. And returned to the Mother."

"Wow. Some story. Is *that* true?" Ringer smiled.

"Yes. Probably. The Children tell that Gron lifted the Impergium; I've heard a few people from the other tribes agree, mostly so they can curse him."

"But by that time, hadn't the Garou already, like, killed the other shapeshifters?...."

The Wars of Rage

Mandy passed him a flask. "Here: it'll relax you. Yeah, the other shapeshifters mostly died, mostly because of the Garou. Including the Children of Gaia."

"What do you mean, sister? The Children tried to help — to save the Others! And we—" A log crackled and hissed.

"—Are at fault. The Others trusted us, and that was their undoing. I myself count six times when the bears or the crocodiles were lured to 'peace talks' with a Child of Gaia as mediator. Each time, another tribe used the 'meeting' as an occasion for ambush. Once, Faces-the-Moon was given a 'peace talen' that had a Fire-spirit bound into it, and two sounders of the Boar-folk burned to death where Shadow Lords did not slay them. She went herself to seek the Grondr, to apologize, and they killed her in revenge." Joné, face darkening, turned to her Visor and stylused through several layers of email to a GPS page.

"So the warrior tribes tricked us? Then it isn't our fault." Ringer sipped at hot mead, ginger and cinnamon the flavors he could name.

"Great for the throat, don't you think? It wasn't just that they tricked us, it's that we kept trying and trying to mend fences that were long since scattered ash." Homemade cookies came around on a wooden plate. "When someone, anyone, sought our help, we were ready to give it: take offerings that concealed poison or hexes, give our safe-

guard to noncombatants who they'd slay when we turned our backs." She shook her head. "And it happened on both sides, too. When they were hunting the lynxes in Europe, the lynxes sometimes came to our ancestors for sanctuary, then killed them and their Kin to avenge their own brethren. There was plenty of hatred on both sides, and sometimes even the Children got caught up in it." An old sorrow hung on her face. "We're not saints. Sometimes a Child would lose a loved one to the Wars, and she'd go looking for justice — revenge, more like it. Sometimes our ancestors felt more loyalty to their friends and allies among the Garou Nation than to Unicorn. Sometimes the Rage just took over. As much as we want to be of one heart and one mind, we're still individuals at heart. Some of our ancestors — let's be honest, some of our *contemporaries* have done stuff we're all ashamed of. That's the tale of human and Garou history in a nutshell."

"Yeah, good stuff." Ringer said. He passed the flask to Hack and Joné, who sipped and returned it to Mandy. "So what started it all?"

"How do you mean, Ringer? You mean how did the Garou begin? Or how did mankind begin? Or how did the Wyrm get trapped in the Weaver's Web?"

"I don't know. I guess, how did humans get to messing with nature, instead of the other way round? Why didn't they just stay like they were?"

"Well, that's the toolmaker puzzle, isn't it? The whole mess of the Weaver and the Wyrm is connected to that — that when humans started to make tools, and to teach each other how to make tools, that's when the Wyrm got wound in the Web. Which caused which, I don't know. Maybe it's the humans' fault — they've managed to do a lot of stuff without any help. That's why we're here, you know, on the edge of the Apocalypse: it's humans' toolmaking that ended in this world of giant factories and bombs, corporations and chainsaws, diapers and newspapers. And try as we might, we can't go back. But it all goes back to the hand ax, or the basket, or whatever the first tool was. And given how much easier they make life, can you blame people for wanting them? That's the toolmaker puzzle: you make things, and you eventually make something that can wreck the world."

"Depressing; thanks, Mandy." Ringer was smiling ruefully. "Maybe the next story won't be so downbeat."

She returned his rueful smile. "They can't all be stories we want to hear, Ringer. If they were, we wouldn't be telling any of the stories that *need* to be heard."

Origins of the Children of Gaia

The pack watched a longhaired man approach Justice-Like-Great-Waters carrying a guitar. "Hey, it's Eric — Hey! Eric!" The youngish Garou waved back at her. Others were hooting at him, some clapping. "He's great — you ever hear him?"

"No — is he like, a folksinger?" Ringer wondered which would be worse — listening to this guy or pretending to like his music.

"Yeah... anarchy folk-punk, I guess. Lives with a Philodox named Sunfrog at a Bone Gnawer Hillfolk caern in Tennessee and does a lot of rabble-rousing. He'll sing us his story, I bet." Eric tossed a few sticks onto the blaze and began, smooth voice rising and breaking on the passions that the song conveyed. Ringer realized on the second chorus that Eric was singing in Garou, not English, and on the third chorus he joined in.

Ringer heard:

The Garou were born, in the world's morn,
Brave wolves to ward their mother
Brave wolves they turned, fooled by the Wyrm
And set to fight each other.
For Gaia's every daughter, for Gaia's every son
The ways divide, the water wide
Our path to peace we climb
We are all Gaia's Children, the many tribes are One,
From war we come, Her peace our home
Deep are the eyes of time
The tribes divide, each takes a side
Takes two sides t'make a war
And Garou died, blood ties untied
Rot filled the Nation's core
The Mother peered, her great eyes teared
Into a caern of slaughter
From there she got, from death and rot
Five of her sons and daughters
In Mother's nest, against her breast
The five dead Children lay
Cold as the earth, but a new birth
Great Gaia whelped that day
To each she spoke, and live they woke
One from each blessed Moon
Her sacred breath woke them from death
Though undeserved, a boon
You're Gaia's child and undefiled
Preserve our Mother's peace
The tribes unite, your heart keep bright
Though struggles never cease
And from this tale, know you can't fail
A darkened world to heal
As did those five, keep hope alive
Her love and peace make real

The crowd of humans, wolves and in-between shapes clapped and howled their approval.

"So, that's how the Children came to be?" Joné asked. "Gaia brought dead puppies back to life?"

"Yes." Rich spoke, his Glabro form at the edge of terrible. "The Great Mother's mercy brought back to life the first five pups slain by Garou hands. They were the silver pack — one of each moon, like us — that became the Children of Gaia. She charged them with healing and peace and these remain our work today." Ringer saw the other then.

A thin man sitting on a log near the pack: it was the scholar who'd spoken of Sumer. Something about his look told Ringer that he wasn't convinced by the folk song. "Honored sir," Ringer began, unsure of the proper mode of address in the Old Tongue, "is this tale to your liking?" The man wore an ironic smile, clipboard no longer in his hand.

"Mandy Barret's pack, innit?" The guy seemed friendly enough; perhaps in his early thirties, dark-complexioned and prematurely bald. He spoke with a slight English accent. "I'm History-of-Clay." The others shook hands, Rich merely touching his hand for a moment as was usual for Glabro and Crinos Garou when greeting one in Homid.

"Yeah, you told us about Uru whatever in Sumeria. Good story!" Joné came up and shook the man's hand. "What did you think of the last one? You're a historian, right?"

"Yes... I'm a paleographer, really, work with old inscriptions. Same thing, and I do teach history at a college in Palestine. No, it's a fine tale, but there are others."

"How do you mean, others?" Rich had sprawled on the grass in Glabro as the others sat down.

"There are other tales of how we came to be. You know that one...."

"What are the others?" Joné was intrigued; Ringer could see her activating the MP3 recording mechanism on her Visor. The damn thing had to be a fetish, as much as she had crammed in there. He heard Rich growling. Signs flicked and danced on the indiglo screen as the Garou scholar spoke.

"Time isn't a one-way street, not even the two-way street our wonder-working foes would claim. It is a maze; our knowing of it mazier still. No one can say when a legend is legend, when a myth is a myth, or when a piece of knowledge becomes so shabby and unreal as to be a 'fairy tale'; myths are not lies but stories about what is true. So take this as a story, and not much of one. But it's about us, who and what we are.

"No one knows where the Garou truly came from, save that it was from Mother Gaia. The oldest tales used to begin, 'When we awakened...' or 'When we first took the Wolf shape...' or "In the days of Progenitor Wolf...' But there are songs older still, choruses no Garou alive can understand. We claim to be the oldest of the shapeshifter races... maybe there are those older than we.

"Once there was One Tribe, the Garou Nation entire, as Gaia intended. Maybe because it was a golden age uncorrupted by the Wyrm, maybe because there were so few of us that we had little need or room for argument. I don't know. But we didn't stay that way.

"Human numbers grew when humans developed more and better tools for hunting and gardening: better food supplies. The Impergium you all know about. We slew humans to prevent their numbers from growing, but also to prevent the skilled and powerful hunters from challenging our terror-rule over the two-legs. We wanted to control their food-gathering, use them as breeding stock, drive them as cattle. But even so we became aware that humans were more than just chattel, more than just a bunch of broodmares or studs. The rock art of Altamira and Lascaux, the Gaia-statues of Willendorf, the Tassili paintings all bore witness to humans' ability to create beauty and to revere the Mother. They had something we did not, something we still have not. Maybe the Mother gave them this because we have so much. Call it the 'nameless within them' if you will... it makes each one of them precious.

"But with this realization came disagreements. Factions began to form over the simple question: What to do about the human population? Some were for brutal control, so the humans couldn't drive other animals to extinction like the mammoth: these became a faction of lupus, ultimately the Talons. Some for continued management of humans as subjects... these were the Fangs, many others too. One faction argued for the lifting of the ban, and the last and greatest to plead for it was Gron. You know about him-her too. How many champions he-she challenged and defeated simply to raise the question: should we lift the Impergium?

"The Children of Gaia were simply the Garou who wanted peace both with humans and with other Garou, and who worked, and fought for peace, and still do. That is not much of a story, but it is who and what we are. And must be."

"Hey... that makes sense. That we were just the Garou who wanted peace." Joné said. Ringer saw Rich shifting, more and more uncomfortable. "History-of-Clay, do you think that the Garou—?"

"The Garou are the children of Mother Gaia. Let no one dispute this!" Rich was on the brink of Crinos, his own true shape, rage and death. Mandy turned to him.

"Rich, spin down. It's just a story, that's all. If you want to tell one-" But it was too late. The manwolf shape erupted, roared —

Fell. Ringer stepped aside to avoid the dead weight. Rich's injuries from falling would heal anyway. He weighed too much to catch. A clawed hand slashed the air as he crumpled, air driven from his giant lungs as he hit the ground with a *whoof*. His head jerked back, over and over. "Get something between his teeth to prop his mouth open," Mandy barked quickly. "Ringer, your practice bo —" Ringer handed it to Mandy. Rich had clawed up meters of earth by then, Crinos hide sliding on grass and dirt. Joné and Mandy were in Glabro, holding their packmate's jaws open to let Ringer get the staff in. Hack held Rich's right arm with his jaws, himself shifted to Hispo to hold the Crinos down. "'With a human, you want a rag, something soft, to keep from breaking their teeth. But Garou just bite through. I think he's over the first of it now...." They sat with Rich, dodging the spasming claws, eventually moving closer as he fell still. Ringer sat by his friend's shoulder, one hand lightly over the fur of Rich's back. Gaia! Here I am packmates with an epileptic werewolf, and he's the *normal* one! The thought was amusing... the hours wound on.

The tales ended finally with a story from some Canadian Glass Walker about the great Dragons. Joné listened and made some notes in her "Seeker" files, but Ringer just stayed with Rich, seated on the torn earth, a hand on the Crinos paw of his stricken friend. Sometimes the paw jerked, then was still. But his breathing was even, heart rate steady. This was a bad seizure but not one of the killing ones that Mandy had told Ringer about. Human medicine did not work on Rich's Crinos form. A few metis had tried antispasmodics, but even Tegretol didn't help. Ringer held on.

Justice Like Great Waters conferred with Garret and History-of-Clay and then arose. She spoke.

"These have all been worthy tales, true or false, of present or past. It is not simply being that makes what is and unmakes it. It is *telling*: so it has been since the Before when the Story walked in emptiness. To tell of a thing for the first time is to make it, to make it real. To hear of it and retell it is to remake it, not only in the ear, but in the Shadow, for each tale has a spirit.

"Let Amanda Barret, Steam Rising on Teacups, come forth to take her boon." Amid backslaps from her pack, Mandy got up and walked with pride to the circle's center. "Amanda, you did not only tell tales to the gathering, that renown or spoils might be yours. You told them to your own pack, that they might know and understand. You are a true Galliard and you may take this boon." The older woman handed Mandy a length of hempen cord knotted and braided into strange patterns. "The Unbroken Cord. As many times as it is cut, it remains one. To each of the pack, the pack leader's greatest power: Gift, rite, or simply some skill. It has aided many of Gaia's heroes; may it aid you as well." The crowd clapped, cheered and howled. Mandy hugged Justice and walked back to where the others sat, huddled round Rich.

"We can make, you know, necklaces or something out of this?" Joné examined the length of braided, knotted line. "The book I read didn't have these knots."

Eventually the seizure passed and Rich sank into sleep, Joné bringing a blanket to cover the Crinos shape as Umbra dawn broke. "You know," Joné said, "I heard another story about where the Children came from."

"Oh?" Ringer was half asleep.

"Pretty simple really. When the Western Concordiat took shape, kind of a Garou civilization, each totem had the Garou who did something different. Fangs ran stuff and fought, Talons took the wild, the Fianna were the singers, the Gnawers the beggars and thieves... we were the healers, the priests. Not Children of Falcon or Stag, not Irish, German, African... earth's sons and daughters, native everywhere, welcome everywhere. Children of Gaia, the ones who spoke and did the Mother's will, not the tribe's or their own. Not a tribe ourselves, really, just the Garou who did what was right. No matter how hard it seemed. Still do."

"That... seems right to me. I guess we have to choose what we want to believe. You know, I heard that before. My teacher in school said something funny one day, said religion is choosing the forms of worship from poetic tales. The Baptist girl who sat in front of me got really mad."

"Huh. Okay. Hey, Rich, you okay now?" He shook the great metis shape.

"Yeah. Yeah, I'm okay, I guess." Rich sat up, Crinos shape covered in dirt and torn grass. "Hey, let's go back to the real world." They did so.

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The Trials of the Current Age

Another campfire; another night

Welcome. Welcome to my fire. I am honored that you have come all this way.

I am Long Scars Suffered, a watcher-of-things. My voice is not popular at some of our moots. I am not a hope-speaker, one who sees humans embrace one another in a street or at a festival and says that the world must be turning for the better. I am not the smiling elder that tells the pups of much good and little ill, so that the hope will burn all the brighter in their chests. My tongue is harsh and my teeth are still sharp. I speak of the ill things I see, not because I wish to kill hope — as some have claimed — but because I would make certain that hope is strong enough to withstand the current of Apocalypse. There are things that *must* be heard, even by our youngest and most innocent. There are things that *must* be done.

But you already know all these things, or else you would not have sought this old wolf's fire, yes? You honor me. May I honor you in return with stories of the dogs that nip at the heels of our tribe. Listen:

The "Abolition" of Camps

It is... hard to discuss this issue without speaking ill of a rightly respected elder such as True Silverheels, but...

But the call to abolish the camps is a mistake. In my eyes, and in the eyes of others. You think I mean those who held renown and power within those camps and now stand to lose it? No. I mean those who look within ourselves, and accept what we find there.

We are part wolf, we Garou. And wolves are territorial. And we are part human. And humans are territorial. We are even as much spirit as flesh. And spirits are territorial. We can no more give up the idea that borders and factions — and *packs* — are important to us than a goose can give up the idea that it must warm itself in the south come wintertime.

True Silverheels, praise and bless his name and his noble brow, thinks too much like a human. He believes that his intellect can overcome his instincts — and perhaps in his case it can. But to expect all other Children of Gaia to be able to do the same simply because it is asked of them? To expect it to be the *right* thing to do, to deny what we are in the name of Unicorn's ideal?

There, you see? I disagree most strongly. Many others do the same. And we... and we fight over whether we should give up these territories, these packs-of-packs, or not. We *fight*, though none have yet died for one side or another. By calling for an end to the borders and families that are so dear to our instincts, True Silverheels and his supporters have thrown another border between us.

I have said too much on this already, I think.

The New Plagues

We consider ourselves the healers of the tribes, and so we pride ourselves on knowing most about the diseases that afflict our Kin and ourselves. We were quick to discover that the AIDS-killer spread from one mate to another, and thus we could warn our Kin and ourselves. Some did not listen, of course; the drive to procreate for the sake of enjoyment fills us, particularly the homids. But we knew, almost sooner than the humans did, and our homids became very involved in the struggle to cure the sickness. No, not simply for self-preservation; even I am not that bitter. No, from compassion as well as self-interest. Even today, they fight the disease.

But... there may be more. The AIDS-killer is, I believe, only the first wave. Just as AIDS crept into American society and began killing people in earnest long before it came into the greater public's awareness, other diseases are now beginning to take hold without anyone becoming the wiser. New York. Cairo. Calcutta. London. Johannesburg. Rio de Janeiro. Each of these cities has seen an outbreak of some new disease, some epidemic that is — so far — limiting itself to a small but unmourned portion of the human population.

Some say that Mother Gaia is the one crafting these sicknesses, trying to reduce the humans to a tolerable level once more. I say that is untrue, for *we* are Mother Gaia's fangs, and such would be our duty. No, I and those I speak with look at the patterns and we see a deliberate hand — but not the Mother's.

It is as if someone is using these cities as... I forget the word. The dishes that — yes. Thank you. Petri dishes. It is as if these cities are petri dishes where some person, or thing, or group is cultivating and experimenting with new sicknesses. Or perhaps — if the old wolf may speak with a harsh tongue — the cultivation and experiments are done, and the plagues have been unleashed already. Whoever bred them is now waiting to see how much damage they can do — perhaps before the next batch is released.

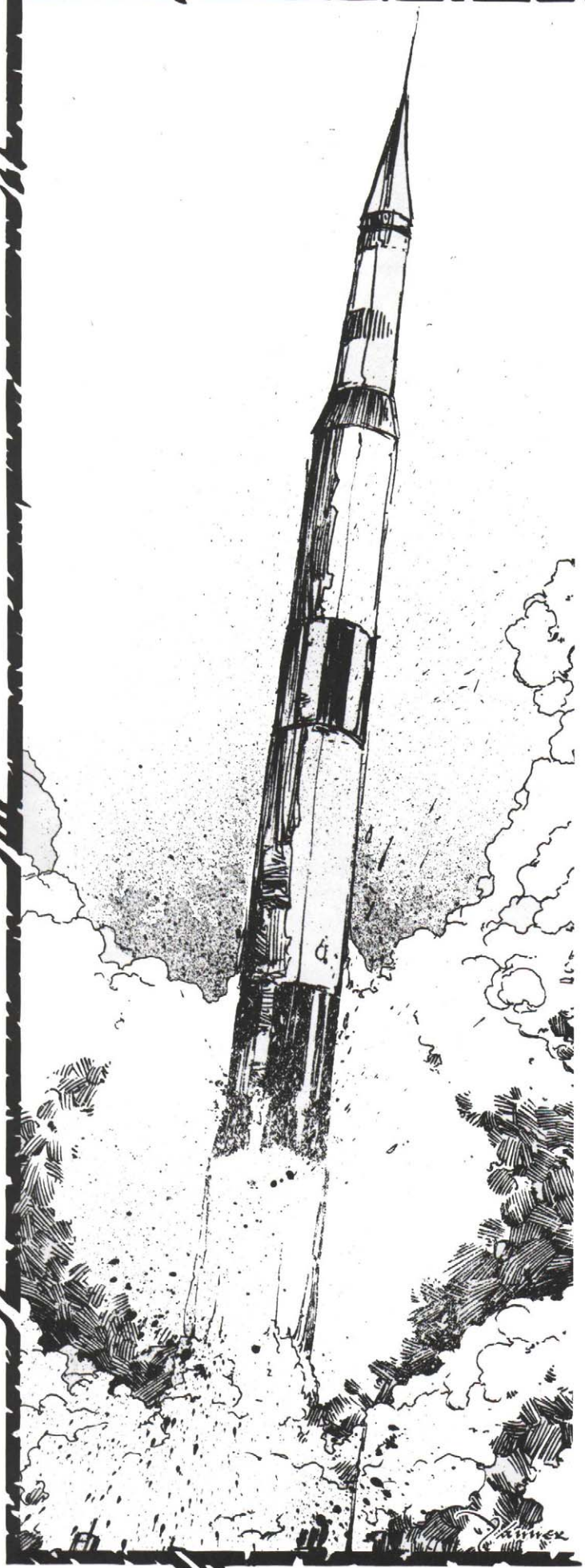
So. If you value the humans — and we all do — you must take this warning seriously. Many of us are already in the cities, working among the infected to heal and to prevent. But there are not enough to both cure *and* seek out those who may be deliberately unleashing these diseases. It is an effort that you may wish to join, I think. If someone is truly trying to kill as many humans as possible with sickness, then all the old stories about the horrors of the Impergium will seem as humorous fireside tales should it come to pass.

Rogue Nukes

Hrrr. Some of you are not old enough to remember the fear of nuclear fire. It was the most horrifying thing that they explained to me after my Change. For decades, it was all humans could think of; the threat of an Enemy pressing a button, as easily as opening an elevator, and killing the world. Oh, the tribe remembers these days; they sing tales of those who argued and protested for the governments to take apart their bombs, and they say that eventually they won. The Cold War is over now. The threat is ended.

No. Did these bombs simply vanish? Did the circuitry evaporate, the plutonium turn to lead, the arming systems transform into home appliances? They did not. Of course many still sit in their wasp-tunnels, still connected to the same buttons that did not go away, just in case a petty man in power needs to kill a continent. Others, though.... Others have been taken apart, and sold.

Yes, sold. Because the people who used to have them needed bread, or drink, or luxuries. Because the



people who wanted them had money, and the same sick desire that made people build these things in the first place. Some are now in the hands of evil men. Some are in the hands of organized criminals who look for the most profitable buyer. And some are surely in the hands of the Enemy.

No greater nightmare exists. These bombs, this fire — it is out there, waiting to be used. From what we see of the world, we know that there will be those willing to use them. And how can we fight with protests? Whose embassy shall we march on? No. This is a thing of the shadows, and in the shadows we must go. All tribes rightly fear these things being used, but none more than us — these weapons were our greatest enemy for most of our elders' lives, and now we do not know where they have all gone. But we must find them, or soon the entire world will feel the pain the East did in June of 1999.

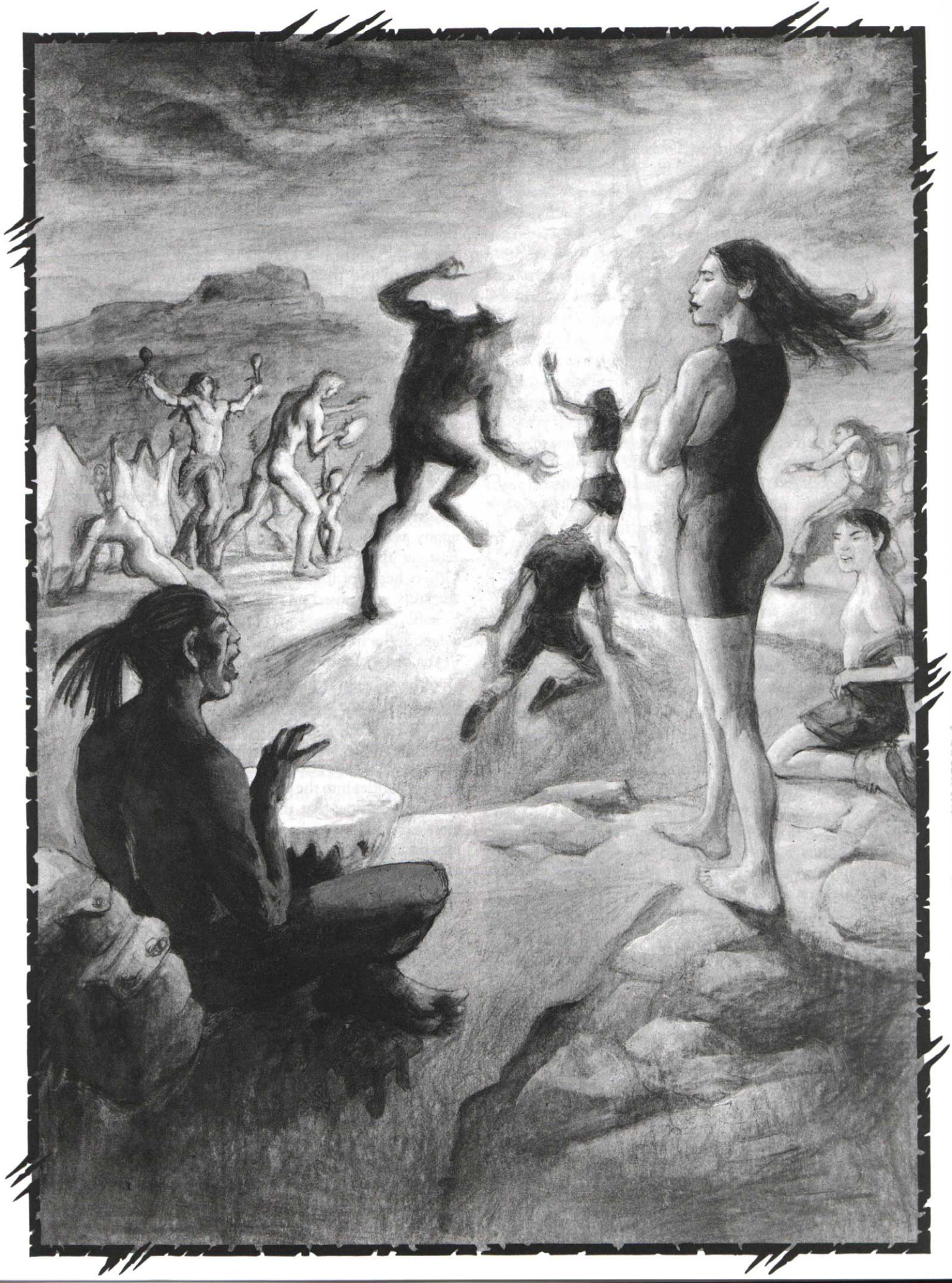
The Ravaged Land

Ah. I see some of you know the date. Some were sensitive enough to the Mother's pain to feel Her agony as Her skin blistered and peeled, over in the East, at the center of an "unexpected" hurricane. Others heard of it second-hand, third-hand. And as the story was passed on and repeated, it grew no less horrific. Someone — some*thing* — had used a spiritual weapon, the likes of which we had never before seen, in the heart of Bangladesh.

I have heard it likened to a nuclear weapon. The destruction, some say, was the same — only that it fell on the other side of the Gauntlet, and blasted the Penumbra to glass. So the humans do not know what happened, and they cannot see the poisons that seep from the other side of the Gauntlet into the physical world. But we know, of course. We know that the spirit and the material are closely linked, one to the other. Just as poison that seeps into the earth will poison the Umbra in turn, so too does the damage to the spirit world kill the potential of this land. Someone has committed a grave atrocity against the world, and for what purpose? Who could even harness such power? And what madness drove them to think they could be safe from such a thing?

So. We send Ragabash to unearth what knowledge they can, to hopefully discover the culprits. We send Theurges to heal the land as best they can. We send Philodox to question the surviving spirits. We send Galliards to coordinate all we learn. And when we find who did such a thing, we will send Ahroun — we *must*, or we will prove ourselves a toothless, useless thing that can only show its belly to the Mother's enemies in hopes that they will scratch us rather than gut us.

We have no time left. We must act.



Chapter Two: The Grove

Who is this Unicorn but the only-begotten Son of God?
— Saint Ambrose

Camps

"So what are these "camps" I keep hearing about? Are they like political parties, or what?" Ringer sat with Amanda and the others listening to a folksinger. The guy sucked, but it wasn't polite to let him know, no matter how much Ringer would have liked to put the guitar out of its misery by smashing it over its owner's skull.

"Not really. They're just factions within the tribe. All tribes have them, from what I hear, to some degree; some are geographical, but most are ideological. All of ours were — are, still — based on ideology, even if they aren't as important as they used to be, since True Silverheels called for an end to them. I mean, they all share Unicorn's ideal for peace. They just have different ideas about how to get it.

The Anointed Ones

"Now, these guys were the real peaceniks. Worse," Amanda shifted in her chair, "than Joné will ever be. Renounced all violence, and refused to compromise on the issue. The trouble with that was—"

"The War of the Apocalypse." Rich's human face was grim. Ringer wondered for a moment how the metis' human shape could hold so much Rage. He had been in the War since before he was even conceived.

"Right. Like it or not, Gaia made us so we could fight, and totally swearing off war is about as natural as asking a hawk to get everywhere by walking. The Anointed were real sages. They taught us Gifts and rites to help with Rage… we owe them a lot. But when a Black Spiral hell-horde comes knocking, nonviolence doesn't help much. No one would let them join multi-tribal packs; I mean, if you know someone isn't going to bare fangs against a Spiral that has your throat in its jaws, you don't want them for a packmate. Save for a few that still hang out in the heart of some all-Children septs, they're all gone. Least, far as I know."

Joné looked sad. "But… that doesn't mean that nonviolence doesn't work, doesn't really work sometimes. Look at the Angels in the Garden. They worked to rescue abused children from this cult called the Seventh Generation. I know two of the kids they saved; we brought them within the Veil and they are Kinfolk now. They won, in a way; the warriors of other tribes cut out the heart of the Seventh Generation,

and they focused on the healing and protection of the innocents. Good for them!

"Look, maybe it doesn't always happen. Maybe it's rare, rare as... the flowering of the bamboo. Maybe you can work all your life and live all your life and die and never... see it happen, see it be real. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't try. You have to." Joné was earnest. Ringer's skin crawled, even as sun warmed him through a gap in the trees. He thought of the sky-watchers that waited and waited for the millennial returns of comets, of the building of cathedrals over centuries. Was peace that rare? It was that precious, surely. A cloud passed and they enjoyed the short pause in the hot sun. The weather had gotten really nasty.

"Peace might come only after the Apocalypse, yeah. Or sooner. Yeah... the Angels worked hard for peace, Joné, and they're mostly dead too after that gang of child fomori got in with those lick-on tattoos. The Seventh Gens *are* gone, but not thanks to us chanting or burning incense. But the Angels disbanded after that. Partly 'cause their main enemy was gone, partly thanks to True's call for unification. Some of them hooked up with another group, though; one that doesn't call itself a camp, but merits the word."

Seekers of the Lost Tribes

Amanda looked at the screen and laughed. "You're a Seeker, Joné? I knew you were into weird stuff like UFOs, but this is just over the top!"

"I just do their web pages!" Joné protested. "Anyway, it's a harmless little hobby."

"Tell that to the ones ripped apart by Black Spirals."

Ringer leaned over Amanda and joined her in looking at the computer screen. "Who are the Seekers?"

"Suicidal nutballs."

Joné took off her shoes and crossed her legs in the chair. "Hey!" She pointed to some information on her screen. "Legend has it, Ringer, that the Garou can win if they can unite all the tribes. Considering the state of the Bunyip, Croatan, and White Howlers, this is a little difficult. The Seekers, or Seekers of the Lost Tribes, are trying to make this legend a reality."

"You *are* nutballs."

"Are we?" Joné began to quickly click through links, highlighting pictures and text. "Where there's Kin, there's hope. While there are no more Bunyip left, a group of Seekers believes they've found some surviving Kin in northern Australia. Of course, this wouldn't

be the first time they've thought that." Maps of the Torres Strait filled the screen until Joné clicked again.

"Here in America, we've documented several cases of 'spirit wolf' sightings that match what we know of the Croatan lupus. In fact..." Joné pulled up a picture on the web page of a half-visible object in a forest that resembled a wolf. "Here's some photographic evidence. In addition, we're getting real close to tracing the actual bloodline of the Croatan in several surviving native genealogies; there are some Creek and Catawba families that might have the Old Blood."

Ringer looked hard at the picture on the screen, which was furry and blurry. "Are you hunting Garou or Bigfoot?" Straightening up, he announced, "It's crazy. And what about the White Howlers? They're about as lost as a cause can get."

Joné smiled. "Well, Ringer, we just try to rescue Black Spiral cubs. Or keep their Ronin alive. And if we can't keep one with us, maybe a half will do." She waited for it to dawn on him what she was saying. "So, you wanna give up on Rich? Or would you rather become an honorary member?"

"Uh, I guess... if what he says is true, then we're all members. Except we're Finders. Not just Seekers."

"She isn't telling you everything," Amanda said. "There's another version of the legend that says we need all the Changers, not just the Garou. So we'd need to find the Sons of the Bear, those giant lizards, whatever they were called, all of them. Most of which, of course, were driven into extinction several millennia ago, and some of which were kin to animals that are likewise extinct. And how likely is that?"

"I don't know, 'Manda, but—" Joné closed down the computer to save battery power. "I'm at least going to try! Besides, think of what we learn even by looking. Garou fetishes, new spirit allies, new ways of thinking. The ways of being Garou are bounded but infinite."

The Patient Deed

"There were other camps too." Amanda walked with them as Hack padded ahead. "My parents and some Hell's Angels were part of—"

"The Hell's Angels? With the Children of Gaia?" Ringer was laughing and scared at the same time.

"Of course we thought they were with us," Amanda said. "They seemed to be the same thing as us, rebels and outcasts. The Patient Deed — that's the camp that tried this — always held that we should welcome all, try to stay our hands, not fight till the Last Day. Not afraid of violence, but wanting it in its proper place. But just as always, we were assuming the natural goodness of people. And we were wrong."

"Why do I think I've heard this before?" Joné muttered.

"We keep pounding ourselves about the Wars of Rage," Ringer added. "I don't think this is related to some fault you see in the Children. We know better by now."

"Do we?" Amanda asked. "Let me tell you about my parents. They made the same mistake only a generation ago and they thought they had it all figured out, too." She grimaced and the memories came to her. "Of course, they were a little more foolish than most...."

"They were what would probably be called 'hippies' nowadays, but really they were just part of the whole Berkeley intellectual crowd. For a while they hung out with a writer named Ken Kesey, became part of his group of 'Merry Pranksters.' Stayed at his place all the time smoking pot and dropping acid."

Joné interrupted briefly to ask, "Kesey? Didn't he write *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*? Was he one of us?"

"Yes, he wrote the book. No, he wasn't one of us. We were in that scene, but it wasn't ours." Amanda took another sip of her drink before continuing. "Anyway, around 1965 that whole crowd began embracing the Hell's Angels. Saw them as alienated American heroes or something like that. Eventually Kesey got in contact with the Angels through Hunter Thompson. It was the day he was having charges for marijuana use dropped and Kesey and my parents were putting up a big sign reading 'THE MERRY PRANKSTERS WELCOME THE HELL'S ANGELS'. Needless to say, the cops were all over the place.

"According to my dad, everyone was worried the Angels would get violent after dropping too much acid. Turns out it made them as serene as any of the peaceniks they were hanging out with. When my parents described sitting down with Allen Ginsberg, Richard Alpert, and a bunch of Hell's Angels in a circle to chant the *Maha Prajnaparamita Sutra*, they spoke with the reverence of people who had walked with Daniel in the den of lions.

"Of course it was all bullshit. They had no idea what the Angels really were, and the drugged out peace caused by LSD didn't help their misinterpretation. All the radicals in the Berkeley scene began to assume there was some sort of natural alliance gong on, and they loved it. Students who didn't even have the guts to sign a petition or shoplift a candy bar admired how the Angels didn't come on with theories and songs and quotes, but with muscle and sheer balls.

"So comes this big 'Get Out of Vietnam' march. Everyone either thinks the Angels are more peaceful than they are made out to be, or misread the motiva-

tion for their violence. My parents were at the head of that march, fifteen thousand strong, leading marchers from Berkeley to the Oakland Army Terminal. They were met by a four-hundred-man flying wedge of Oakland policemen decked out in riot gear. During the standoff, along comes a gang of twelve Hell's Angels screaming 'Traitors!' 'Communists!' and 'Beatniks!' It was all my father could do to keep from Raging while they beat up some of the leaders and tore down the speaker equipment. The police eventually restrained them, but the damage was lasting.

"So in the end, the Angels revealed their true colors. They didn't attack any more marches, though they did have a press conference where they called the marchers a bunch of un-American traitors and volunteered their services to the President for the war in Vietnam. He never took them up on the offer, though."

"Gee, I wonder why?" Joné said with feigned shock.

"Yeah. So when True called for the abolition of camps, a lot of the Patient Deed who remembered failures like that stood down and went along with it. It's kind of a shame, though; it was basically encouraging the idea that the camp hasn't done anything worthwhile since the 1960s — hell, it encourages the idea that they never did anything worthwhile *before* the 60s! And that's just so wrong. The Patient Deed was reaching out to the Uktena and Wendigo during the Old West era and even before; they were trying to mend fences in Turkey and the Middle East and North Africa even before that. But because some of us fixate too much on the same decade — one decade, out of millennia of existence as a tribe! — nobody looks beyond it much. The Patient Deed suffered from that. It's scary. You'd think that with our ancestors accessible to us, more of us would try to remember more, but damn if we just don't keep letting the immediate past define us."

"So you're saying that because we don't look back, we have to keep relearning the same lesson: 'the enemy of my enemy is not necessarily a friend?'" asked Ringer.

Amanda shook her head. "No. I'm saying we can't trust anyone unless we know their goals and methods are something we can live with. And even then, we can't be sure. Of course, the Children have made that mistake since the beginning, my parents made it in '65, and we just made it now."

Imminent Strike

"But isn't it worthwhile to get help from others? Especially if there's something like the Apocalypse going down? Is there anyone in this tribe that's ready to *fight*?"

"Ringer, there are many Children who seek the path of peace but don't rule out striking back. The Imminent Strike — they were the most aggressive about it. They were the ones who were willing to fight alone in the Last Battle."

"Alone? How?"

"Well, it wasn't something they *wanted*, mind. But they didn't want to have to look out for any other tribes — or camps — that wouldn't have their backs one hundred percent. See, the reasoning went like this: Most other tribes, and most other camps, just weren't able to cooperate fully on account of their own hang-ups. The Shadow Lords were too obsessed with hierarchy and absolute chains of command. The Get didn't care whether the Garou survived the Final Battle or not, just as long as they won — so they weren't trustworthy. The Black Furies were too exclusive, the Uktena too close to the enemy, the Silver Fangs too ailing, and so on. As for the rest of the Children of Gaia, well, the Strikers didn't think we were willing to go the distance to win the war; they were convinced that we wouldn't give up our ideals if we had to."

"So I guess that True's call...?"

"You know, I talked to a Striker not long after that, and asked him if the new unity was what he was looking for. He said, 'If everyone had immediately embraced it, then yes, it's what I'd have been looking for. But they didn't. Looks like the rest of the tribe still isn't ready.'"

"What a hardass." Joné pursed her lips.

"You don't know the half of it. These guys were hardcore. They cultivated martial arts, Iskakku, all that, collected war fetishes, trained all the time, and every once in a while they'd drift over and ask us some riddles, testing us to see if we were ready for the Final Battle. Now you don't hear about that sort of thing much, but there's still a good number of our tribe who keep on building their war skills, readying themselves. I don't think the Imminent Strike disbanded. I think they're still out there, only now I wonder if they aren't trying to recruit more people from other tribes instead of us." She sighed. "I hope they haven't given up on the rest of us, I really do. I mean, they were never really the best peacemakers, but damn if they weren't good at teaching others to defend the works the rest of us had put together."

Servants of the Unicorn

"Okay... what about the struggle to unify the tribes before the End Time? Anyone working on that?" Joné led the group back down toward the strange concrete airstrip of the new 'Woodstock.' It was hot as hell and humid as a steambath. "You know, there's

something kooky about this place; doesn't feel right somehow." People were nice, mostly, but the site itself felt weird, charged almost. Was it the status of the place as an old caern?

"Yeah. That was the mission of the Servants of the Unicorn. They were the largest camp before True abolished the camps, or tried to. Honestly, they were a majority of the Children who wanted peace between the tribes and worked for it, and still do."

"Like how?" Ringer asked.

"Well," Amanda went on, "by arranging meetings and talks, by seeking common goals, like Blythe Holdsclaw's unity pact troops. He's a Child of Gaia in the mountain states, and his band was a group of multi-tribe packs that went into the Shadow to find Wyrm-nests and cleanse them. Good fighter, too. Their latest trek started about six months ago, and they aren't back yet."

"Kewl. Can I go?" Ringer twirled his staff.

"He welcomes anyone who's willing to cooperate and hunt down Wyrm-taint. Another Servant is Diana Goddess-daughter; Jamie Martin's her right name. She's worked for years in the troubles in Northern Ireland, taking cubs and Kin to summers in Norway, with Hjorlief Greatheart's sept in the Lofotens. She doesn't scorn fighting if it'll get something practical done. A Get pack trains them together in Garou lore. And trains them in combat... sometimes kids from different sides get to know each other. Peace on the firing range."

"The Get *help* us? I thought they despised us!" Joné was curious.

"No, they're willing to help as long as we provide hideouts for them... take their wounded for healing, all that. Not all of them are racists, you know. They'll teach anyone how to fight, just because they think fighting's fun. Hell, they helped us fight apartheid in South Africa! There were the crazy racist weirdos among the Get who supported the Broderbund and the Total Strategy, but there were some that were even more whacked. They fought apartheid because it 'protected the weak!' They wanted blacks to have the same rights so that if whites were superior, they could damn well prove it — and if they weren't, so that the stronger race would have its opportunity to make its fortune! Loved the old Zulus because they were brave and strong, and wanted that kind of valor in a foe; I hear a few Get even bred with some of the warrior tribes out of Africa. One of them howled in moot once. 'I need no LAW to make me the master. I AM a master and no one will slander me by saying that a law MAKES me

so.' So they lobbied, breathed down a few Afrikaner politicians' necks, generally made a nuisance of themselves... maybe it helped. See, we can get along. There's always something you have in common, something someone wants. Something you can do. So the Servants aren't really a camp, they're just keeping on. Doing some good where they can."

To Ringer, that sounded like all anyone could do.

Bringers of Eternal Peace

"There is one group that I probably should mention, but I don't like even thinking about them." Amanda shivered as she spoke.

Rich seemed confused. "If this group you mention is so repulsive, then why do we even allow them to exist as part of the tribe? The factions are being dismantled."

"The problem is that they aren't actually Children of Gaia. They just think they are."

Now Joné cocked her head in curiosity. "Posers?"

"No. Black Spirals. That's what they are; they just don't know it yet. They call themselves the Bringers of Peace and strive towards bringing about the Apocalypse as quickly as possible."

Hack spat. "That is *sick*."

"How could that happen?" Joné asked. "Wouldn't they be Black Spirals just like any other?"

"If a Child dances the Black Spiral, yes, of course; that's their initiation into their new tribe. But you can fall without actually going into the Black Labyrinth. Think about it; when a Garou gives into the Wyrm he is essentially giving into his Rage. But what about a Child of Gaia who is in control of her Rage? What does she give into?"

Amanda paused for a moment while everyone contemplated the question, then spoke again. "She gives into a perverted version of peace, the 'ultimate answer'. By bringing an end to the world, they reason that this will also bring a final peace to everything. The... third peace. The Wyrm's."

"They're insane!" Rich declared.

"They're Black Spirals," Amanda corrected.

Joné stared off into the distance and began to speak. "I think I saw one of them once. This dirty, battered looking old woman had come to our sept. When she changed to Crinos there were patches of missing hair and her eyes were yellow and jaundiced. She began preaching something about the 'final peace', trying to convert members of the sept. Instead they jumped on her and tore her to pieces. No one ever explained what it was about, but now I think I know. She looked so pathetic, Amanda!"

"Don't feel sorry for her," Hack growled. "Your sept was merciful."

Breeds and Auspices

Homid

Night again and the pack gathered by the camp lamp. Ringer finished the last of his bratwurst and soda.

"We are most of the tribe... most of all the tribes. The other two breeds are just not common enough." Mandy frowned.

"So, you had any pups? I know a good Kinfolk stud." Hack's tail wagged high, the equivalent of a smile.

"Don't be silly. Any children I bore would carry my breed form. That's part of the problem. Male homids can impregnate wolf bitches, but females can't help out in the same way. And there you have it. Homids in our tribe are the majority, and they come from any place, and land, any culture. That's a neat thing about us...." Wind buffeted Ringer's black hair, a sensation he hated. Should shave it again, but Hack likes running his fingers through it, when he has fingers.

"That you're all mutts?" Hack loved homids (one in particular) but enjoyed making fun of them too.

"That we don't just value diversity for its own sake, which is silly. We use our diversity to make ourselves stronger. Pretty much any sept is going to have Children from four or five different countries, from a dozen ethnic groups, from however many lines of work, whatever. Anyone who wants peace, I guess, anyone... spiritual. And a steelworker, a Navy fireman, a crochet artist and a skater don't agree on everything, but they have a lot to bring to the table. I remember Pearl-of-the-River using Chinese herbal medicine to quell my nausea when I was pregnant; she also treated Raised-By-A-Power when the chemo made her puke blood.... Us being from everywhere, all over the place, us accepting pretty much everyone, doesn't make us weaker. Hell, Joné, didn't you say a Black Spiral had logged on to that chat board of yours?"

"He said he was one... it's all totally anonymous, so I have no way to find out. I mean, the spirit that runs it is supposed to open it only to Garou and Kin. So he was Garou, and who would claim to be a Black Spiral who wasn't really one?"

Lupus

"Never see too many four-legs, not in One-Horn's tribe," Hack said as night sounds returned during a break for the bands. "The old blood is too thin. Hell, One-Horn's almost a human himself. Maybe—" Ringer could almost hear Hack shifting further toward human

to do the math—"one in twenty, one in fifty even, left in the tribe. I know you couldn't count a hundred of us all told. Most all of us raised in zoos, like me, dammit. Should be more of us, but there's too little wilderness left. Not enough for a camp of lupus, barely enough to keep the bloodline from dying out. And other tribes claim seniority, except in our old lands — but not here. Not in Europe." Lightning bugs flitted in the fence.

"What about that rite? The one that Mandy said could let homids have lupus pups?"

"Not many want to do that. You two-legs like to think you're better than us...."

"We do not!" shouted Ringer and realized that the wolf was joking.

"Well, we agree with you on most things. This 'peace', now, that's something we argue about. Because wolves don't have war! But we see humans fight, make peace, fight again. You two-legs, always tottering around, falling forward till the other foot catches you, this peace you want is a Weaver-thing, made like a clock, hard to make, hard to fix. Lupus... if we seek peace, it's the peace of Gaia: nature's way where killing is for food, struggling for dominance is not fighting, is not killing. Gaia is not static and She isn't 'nice.' But She is a way of peace."

"But — the Wyld is dying. Every year, more trees are cut down, more species extinct."

"Yeah, so most of us lupus live with humans somehow: sometimes 'wild' on estates, sometimes as pets, sometimes in zoos and stuff. I mean, the three-squares-a-day part's not so bad. And we tend to be healthier, most of the time."

"If you could be, I mean, wild, would you?"

"I don't know. I'd miss talking to two-legs with your crazy ideas, and I'd miss ice cream."

The two of them had drifted away a little. "Hey, dog, let's go for a walk."

Hack followed, no words necessary. "Hack, I don't really know how to say this, but I feel kind of strange here. I mean, are you—"

"Yeah. Rich feels it too. There's something bad about this place, and we can't figure out just what. I want to get some of the Crescent Moons together and try to unriddle it, though."

"Uh, sure. Don't know how much help I'd be, but just tell me if there's anything you need me to do." He swallowed in a throat suddenly dry. "I, actually, was thinking about something else." They walked out of the camping area, through the gate, and into the concert zone. "I was wondering how you—" Music pummeled them as Blip-3.1416 began a set.

"Huh?" Loud music was a real pain to wolves and Garou because of their sensitive hearing. If caught by surprise it was worse.

"Nothing."

Metis

"Rich, do you think the Children are really fair toward metis?" The great wolf-head turned toward her in the camp lamp's light. The noise of the festival roared outside the camp circle. This, was a great place to pass unnoticed as Garou.

"Mandy, that's not a fair question. No tribe, not even the Gnawers, knows how to deal with us. None of them really deals with us the way that they deal with two-legs or four-legs. We know this is true... it's okay."

"No tribe save one, Rich." Joné had head and shoulders out of her sleeping bag, glasses glittering red. She had been starwatching.

The Hispo shape growled. "You mean the Fallen. I know better than you do of what they offer."

"How — what do you mean, Rich?" Mandy was curious now, the asker for once and not the teller.

"I mean that there is one tribe who are fair to metis, and that is the Dancers. And that I have sire-right among them."

"You're a Ronin? I thought Dancers always caught them." Joné's eyes were wide.

"No, there are some packs out there who do their best to rescue Dancer Ronin and bring them to the Children." This Mandy was sure of. "The last one I heard of died two winters past; they were tricked. The Dancer Ronin they had made contact with weren't as Ronin as they thought, and the pack walked into an ambush."

"So what the Web are you talking about, Rich?" asked Joné.

"Gaia's oath that this is a pack secret?" The two women nodded and the not-wolf went on. "I am adopted into the Children." They knew as much. "My mother was Sara Meredydd Evans of the Fianna. My father... was a Dancer."

"Jeez! Does anyone know?" Shock was all over Joné's face. "So you... Dance with one foot? What?"

"I am a Child of Gaia. Would you say that Hack is half Fury? Of course not. And no breath of wrongdoing ever touched my mother."

"She was... seduced? Was it a Bane?" Mandy felt a qualm of fear as she asked. Packmates or not, to suggest, even so far as she had done, that Rich's mother had neared Wyrm-taint would have sparked a duel, likely to the death and beyond.

His voice was completely neutral. "They surprised the sept by blackmailing the watch-spirits and slaying the Kin who guarded the caern during a revel. He raped her and mutilated her with silver, then left her alive to watch her packmates hanged, cut down alive, and skinned over a fire. The Dancers fled as her cousin's pack approached. My mother went to the Sunset Sea Sept when she knew she was pregnant, knowing that a Dancer was the father. Wounded as she was, she bore me, then went with her cousin to attack the Hell's Hand Hive and did not return."

Mandy and Joné sat silently. No answer would come.

"You asked me about metis and fairness. I am here with you when the Sunset Sea Sept knew, all my days, what I tell you. That is my answer."

"Rich... thanks. Thanks." Mandy knew many metis, most living at caerns. "Aren't most sept officials, keepers of the land, aren't they metis?" Joné had recovered enough to propose a safer topic. "I notice that that's something a lot of them do."

"Well, we are born Crinos, and many of us can't rely on staying out of it. So a caern is a safer place for us. Also, it lets us serve."

"Serve? You mean serve Gaia?"

"No. I mean serve fellow Garou. The harder we work, the more we work, the better homids like us. And the easier things are for them." Mandy knew that this was true. Metis rode easier on the superhuman strength and fury of the Crinos form than any others, and she'd seen her metis friend Earthback rebuild a concrete-slab building by hand. Was this why Mule was so sacred to them?

"And, really, it's our rightful place. The center of Garou life is ours. We are the middle breed, the only ones who are born Garou instead of human or wolf. If Gaia marks us, that's her business."

Mandy wondered how many packs would have heard Rich out. The tolerance of the Children had its limits. But it did make sense... what other secrets did metis keep?

Kinfolk

"My mother," Joné said, "has always been glad that I was Garou, gladder once you guys made me a pack member." Ringer and Hack had returned and sat by Mandy. Joné's white teeth flashed in a smile. "But she was really just as glad when my brother was fine, healthy... and Kin. It's a strange thing: all these marriage negotiations and matchmaking to make Kin bear us, but really, who carries the Old Blood? The real tribe...."

"Are the Kin!" Ringer felt he understood for once. "Yeah, I can see it too. I mean, I couldn't do much for myself when I Changed. I was crazy, too full of Rage. Kin

are a lot more than we give them credit for; our parents, our siblings, even for metis they surround us—."

"Bind the galaxy together?" Joné laughed. Ringer went on:

"All those organizations! Gaia Youth Network, my two brothers do tables for them at the college. Gaian Rainbow Action Community Explorers, they raised money for a kid I know who got kicked out the Scouts because he was gay; Gaian Urban And Rural Defense—"

"They cleaned up the stream that runs through the Sunset Sea caern, and got all the property owners to watchdog on their own property! The caern spirit says someday we might restore the salmon run! I was meditating with my feet in the water one time," Amanda chimed in, "and a little old lady, lives by the creek, came down and told me not to pollute the stream 'because the salmon won't come back!'"

Joné went on, "Yeah, when even ordinary humans get involved you know we're doing a good job. I did a website for the Gaian Resources Environmental Education Network. It has places to get nonleather shoes, carpooling chat rooms, links to where you can recycle everything, even fluorescent light tubes, batteries, shrink-wrap and steel waste! I managed to find a place that will take your body weight in plastic bottles and give you a fleece jacket back made from the polymers. I know a couple of chatrooms for Kin and Garou, even a dating network for our Kin and other tribes' Kin. Hell, my parents met that way, at a key exchange party for Kinfolk. The Garou are the warriors, the edge of the tool, but it's Kin keep it working, going."

Amanda said, "It's Kin that keep the Church of Gaia going too. My sister is teaching for them in India right now; I just got a letter from her and an email from a friend of hers in South Africa. Her husband, he's Garou, went to try to negotiate with the Red Talons, and she went just to teach and learn from the humans, Kin and maybe-Kin. To talk about solutions with people at the bottom of the food chain. Yeah, most of the people who work for Unicorn are Kin, not Garou. No Rage, no frenzy. I... I wonder sometimes if the blood grows thin because they can do so much, even without us...because if peace comes, real peace, what about Gaia's warriors? What about us?"

The pack sat silent, man, woman and wolf in thoughts of their own.

Septs and Society

The Voice of the Goddess

Joné asked, "So who... runs a Children of Gaia sept? I saw someone called "Voice of the Mother" on one site. Is that the leader?"

Amanda smiled. "The Voice is a woman who speaks Gaia's will. Sometimes the Children listen. She doesn't command."

"Sounds like a way to get nothing done. So how do you get to be one?"

"Gaia chooses." Amanda gave a wry look. "Supposedly. You basically have to... walk the walk, I guess. I mean, it's not like we don't know Her will. It's just that we don't do it. You have to speak out wisely. Know what you're talking about."

"That sounds more like a politician than a prophet. Do you have to be 'chosen' from above too?" Rich watched across the fire, Hispo-huge and glitter-eyed.

"Don't sneer too loud while you sit on Her body. Yeah, sure, some Voices just butter up the right people. But my grandmother sat as Voice because two elders heard spirits cry her name. You never know who the spirits will choose."

"So, 'Manda, are you the Voice for this pack? You fit your own description." Rich's Hispo voice was thunder in a barrel. "The spirits like you."

"I... uh, I guess I am. I... thanks, I guess." Joné caught embarrassment on the older woman's face. "I might be Voice for the sept when Summer is gone. I hope that's a long time. Voice in Waiting, maybe."

Ringer thought that it wouldn't be a long time, probably.

The Arm of the Goddess

Amanda Barret went on, "Ringer, if I am Her Voice, even in waiting, you must be Her Arm. It is the pack's will. Even Snow Falling on Hackberries. He has said so."

Mandy's words surprised him. "And prop up Beekaw at the sept; his wounds bother him more and more as the years go by."

"Yeah... I knew a guy that was Arm of the Goddess," he said. Ringer felt strange, hot-faced.

Am I blushing? he wondered. The guy had wanted him; hadn't worked out.

"I know what it means. It's doing for Her... not just fighting. Everything. It means leading, but going farther, working harder than the rest. Being an example. Because an arm isn't just a fist. The... hand, being able to make tools, use tools. That's not something Weaver-wrought, not something... wrong. Even lupus have hands," he went on, surprised at himself (he wasn't much of a talker, he'd always thought), "even the Talons. The Arm and the Voice work together. Thanks for the nomination. I'll try to be a deft hand. A clever hand."

Amanda said, "Yes. We'll see how it all works out. Her Arms are doers: look at Cernounos down under, whelping the Bunyip. Those around you have chosen. You won't fail."

The Heart of the Goddess

"But, Mandy, who is it that connects the Head and the Arm of the Goddess?" Rich spoke the Garou tongue, human speech lost in his dire-wolf shape. Woodstock drummed on.

"The shoulder of the Goddess, of course." Joné looked up from the glowing computer screen. "Does the sept have a "Spleen of the Goddess" too?"

"No office or sept's big enough to cover the whole of Her." Mandy was unruffled, used as she was to No-Moons.

"The Hole of the Goddess? Which hole is that?"

"Key-clicker, hush and you might learn something. If you live that long." Rich nodded to Mandy to go on.

"The Heart of the Goddess was the center of the sept, long ago. That was the one who neither did for Her nor spoke for Her, but simply *was* for Her. She, he, would be a metis, an elder, a child. Someone outside the mating rites, someone free from childbearing. Sometimes a man or woman would take the post and dress as the opposite sex, to honor Lore-Speaker Gron who held us to the way of peace."

"So what does, did, the Heart of the Mother *do*? Just meditate all day?"

"The Heart makes connection between the mind and the hand. Not always by speaking, not always by acting. He or she keeps the sept going, by believing, by being himself. Herself. Gives them energy, gives them life. I knew a Heart once who spent her last ten years of life just collecting the life stories of every sept member, Kin and Garou, on video. Let anyone see the tapes, anyone inside the Veil I mean. I saw a few tapes she did. It's amazing how centered it made her sept, how aware of each other as people. I hope they kept those secret from the more conservative Philodox; it'd be a shame if they had to destroy them in the name of preserving the Veil. Another one built a mound, deep inside the caern, spirits guiding him, never speaking. He's gone now. They have danced on that mound fifty years."

"So is there any sept that still has a Heart?" Joné was fascinated.

"There's ours," Rich said, deep voice shaking Mandy's guts. "I am honored to beat there in Her chest."

"What — how did you get to be the Heart? I mean, are you elected or something?"

"You just know. Sunset Sea had no Heart since Roaring-at-the-Stars fell. It comes from below. From where *being* comes from. I can't describe it. You feel how the pack is part of you… you're one with them. It came to me one night, watching, right after we came and got you, Joné. That the pack was whole now. That I am the Mother's Heart."

"What will you do for the pack?"

"Gaia willing, keep you all alive." He settled head on paws, statue-like in the sticky New York night.

Green Branches

"The Two Branches are the other important sept posts. Gathers-Flinders is the Green Branch at Sunset Sea; you've heard her speak on the web, guys. Basically what the Green Branch does is act as a voice for the biosphere, the parts of it that can't speak for themselves, anyway. Her teacher, Raises a Voice, would let the spirits fill him... it was wonderful, amazing. She simply hears them and tells us what they say."

"So do you talk back?" asked Joné.

Amanda went on, "We can. One moot, the Silver Gulch salamander spoke to us, to tell us her breeding pools were poisoned. We asked whether there were any other places she could spawn. I went on that trip, to move the salamanders." Amanda was proud. "The species still lives. There are two elementary schools that work to maintain her habitat now."

Cut Branches

"Some septs still keep Cut Branches. Creepy. I only saw them once, at the sept in Brighton. They... are the voices of the dead. For the ancestors; they usually keep tabs on their own and everyone else's. For the lost tribes, the lost Changers. For the extinct species. That night a Branch got up and sang a tale of the White Howlers, about their mad courage, their 'overmood' she called it, to jump down the Enemy's throat and gut it from within, even if it ate them doing it! About how being proud as the Devil is devilish." She drew a breath. "But still proud. We lamented that their honor was gone."

"I do not defend my... them. Their honor is gone. But know that their valor and strength are not." Rich seemed about to weep, even in Hispo.

"So what do they do? Besides talk?" Joné was reaching for her Visor.

"They move us to remember. And to remember is to act. The Bunyip may be gone, the Croatan, but the fact that they lived and died should move us to do something!"

"I think, after all this talk," Ringer said, "that we are going to see if the Hand of Gaia sept is talking about something else." He smiled. "And if the beer tent is still open. You coming?" The wolf got up and they went.

The mud-wrestling pit was busy this time of night. Ringer watched with appreciation as two men and two women grappled, mostly bare, in the slimy mess. "Good takedown there!"

"This," Hack said, "is the tackiest thing I've ever seen." One woman went flat on her face, covered head to toe in mud. Her opponent leaped on her and splashed mud over the first row of spectators.

"I think it's cool. That people feel free enough to do this, you know?" The guys were shifting, each trying for a hold. He became aware of History-of-Clay standing beside him.

"You a fan of this stuff? Or just like the show?"

"I'm not sure what the difference is," Ringer said. "It's pretty neat to watch, yeah."

"I agree. Y'know, the rave's starting up soon at the second stage.... I'm going to see about a rite there. Maybe y'd like to come with?"

"Uh, sure. Hey, Hack, that okay with you?" The wolf nodded.

The rave was a strange place to be: dancing under the lights, endless techno, Hack in human form because 'it's more fun that way', and the strange Theurge quietly pacing beyond the edge of the crowd, singing a chant that was drowned out. The music was great and Ringer danced a long time, Hack moving in and out of his vicinity, ethereal vocals and samples in a matrix of endless pounding beat. The dancing led him to a strange state of mind, time passing without him, and he looked up when music stopped to find his two companions.

"It didn't work, really. I don't know if you noticed," History-of-Clay said.

"What didn't work? What rite were you trying to perform?" They walked toward the beer tent.

"The spirits... to see if they'd come, maybe. The beat summoning them. But no joy, sorry. I guess trying to keep the rite subtle so the humans wouldn't notice is no way to convince the spirits that they're wanted."

"I, uh, hope it works out better next time. C'mon, Hack, let's go drink some beer."

The Litany

Ringer, half-awake, stretched on the air mattress. The tent was big enough for him to stretch, at least. First time's never that good, they'd told him. The guy had been great, had been wild, had been.... He turned.

A wolf slept beside him, legs moving in dog-dreams.

"Hack, wake up. We gotta talk."

"Morning." Wolves were morning people. Ringer was not.

"Hack, uh, about last night—"

"You feel okay? Happy? Didn't hurt you, did I?"

"Yeah, uh, I feel really good." He smiled, hung his head. "But... I mean, don't you think it's wrong or something?"

"You didn't think so 'bout two a.m." Hack was wearing his human form, possibly in case Ringer wanted more. "Going to blame it on the cheap beer? Come on, you know you're a kweerboy."

"Yeah, I know I'm gay." Ringer wondered briefly where Hack learned everything about human society when he'd been pupped a wolf. Not important. "But, I mean, you're a *wolf!*" Dawn reddened the tent's fabric

"Not now. And when I'm a wolf I don't want you, or anybody, except when the time and the company are right."

"Huh?" Ringer's Garou senses could still smell last night.

"It's — no, don't ask. It's too complicated, take my word for it."

"But, look. I'm human, or at least mostly human. You're a wolf. And we're both *Garou*. Aren't we supposed to... not do this?"

"Well, the Bible stuff is for humans, one or two religions' worth. And I'm not a wolf when we're hittin' the mat. Now, the Litany's another story. I'm not mating with you, because I mate once a year—."

"—In good years." They both laughed. Ringer thought I'll never leave him. Never.

"And if you're hoping for cubs I have some explaining to do." His face grew serious. "But the Litany is for real. Remember Mandy's lesson?"

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"Other tribes don't like our take on the Litany...." Mandy blew across a cup of coffee in Sally Ann's as cars whizzed by. Woodstock was already steamy this early on a summer morning.

"Like the Talons?" Joné dug into a tofu scramble on toast. The owners had let Hack in (good reason to come here) and Ringer had given him last night's Chinese leftovers while the other patrons smiled.

"Like most of them. But," Mandy went on, steam misting her glasses as the patchouli-scented waitress poured more coffee, "the Litany is there for a reason, and it's phrased the way it is for a reason. And things change. Oh, things change."

Garou Shall Not Mate With Garou

Mandy pushed her eggs aside. The diner crowd was thinning as the morning passed. "Yeah, this is a tough one, because humans don't understand us, and wolves are only up for it during estrus. Basically it means don't, really don't, make metis. I know, Rich, you don't like that. Sorry. But that's what it means."

Joné asked, "So two Garou, if they like each other, they can—"

"Careful. Really careful. Our bodies don't work like a human's, so pills and condoms don't always work either. If you're gay, just have a pup by Kinfolk and no one will care; if you're straight, watch it with other Garou."

"But isn't that rule kind of, well, outdated?" Joné was curious.

"No. For one, if you flaunt a Garou lover, other people get jealous, and you don't want to go through what a proven charach goes through. For another... well, I know a Fury who had a metis pup aborted —" Rich growled softly — "because it would have killed her before birth. So watch it."

Combat the Wyrm Wherever It Dwells and Whenever It Breeds

They were back in the truck, highway rushing past. Hack said, "The Litany orders us to battle, but Garou have fought for eons against the Evil One and the Wyrm just grows stronger no matter what we do. If we're working for peace, we've failed." He was in Lupus as usual, sprawled across Ringer's lap. How lucky we are, Ringer thought. If I was dating a human, I couldn't have his head in my lap, not most places.

"There are a lot of ways to 'combat' the Enemy." Mandy turned in the shotgun seat as Rich drove. "Violence really just makes the Beast-Of-War stronger, and it's how the other tribes have kept on losing. If you kill a dozen Black Spirals, the Hive can just go out raping and make more — sorry, Rich. But it's true. But if you create a lasting peace, like the peace between Japan and the US, then the Wyrm loses strength. It's harder work than fighting, but it yields a better crop."

"And if you have to abandon your work for peace because a call to battle goes up?"

"Then you do it. But only if it's a real call to battle. Going slumming downtown, looking for vampires to pick a fight with, that's a manufactured need. You have to learn to tell the difference."

Respect the Territory of Another

"This is one of the lesser commandments these days," Mandy said as they parked the truck amidst myriad vehicles. Hack jumped from the tailgate as Ringer and Joné left on human feet. His nose twitched, maybe, Ringer thought, at the crushed and poisoned grass that lay round them. "Most septs will at least leave you alone unless you cross them. I don't even know why the elders—"

"What the coil is wrong with you?" Hack exploded in the High Tongue. He trotted among them through the festival gate. "Look, you're born human, but you can smell someone else's piss as well as I can. Maybe homids can squash it, but the feeling is real. Any warm-blood, maybe the deaders too, gets jumpy around strangers! It's *not* something you can wish away. You twolegs scent yourselves, wash yourselves, and keep your distance even then. Your blood knows if you don't. There's a *reason* for that rule."

"Yeah, our sept was always really careful, even if we did follow One-Horn," Rich added.

"I think it's good to be polite." Mandy was careful. "We can make alliances more easily if we respect others' beliefs, not just their territory. We are the diplomats of the Garou. That's a good thing to remember." The pack trotted along through a crowd so motley that they looked almost normal, Ringer thought.

Accept an Honorable Surrender

The pack had gotten back to where tents leaned on cedar-bark mulch. Ringer took up his staff and swung into practice, listening as the talk rattled on. Sometimes he thought that the Children were less a tribe than they were a perpetual argument. "Joné, I think you're bent on disputing every point of the Litany! Do you think that your preaching nonviolence means we don't have to fight?"

"No. It means we have another way, another eye to see the All. Look at the commandment to accept a surrender. Show mercy. Doesn't that mean that it's even better to resolve problems without fighting?"

Hack sat up. "It's Gaia's way. All Her creatures have ways to avoid fighting —."

"'Cept humans," Joné muttered, plying cords into some kind of complex braid.

"That's not really true. Even humans created diplomacy and statecraft. Look at the Congress of Vienna! Easy to fight. Harder to talk things out. Humans aren't monsters, no matter what some of my lupus buddies say." Ringer listened, interested in spite of himself.

Mandy added, "It means more than that too. When we must have a leader, when we need to order, there are better ways than fighting. We didn't invent democracy, but it does work better than one–man rule...."

Hack spoke. "Wolves decide things together. We always have. Look at us crossing the ice. One goes, sees how the ice bears her. Others watch. If the alpha goes and the others know the ice won't carry them, he isn't alpha long!"

Submission to Those of Higher Station

"Speaking of which, who's our alpha?" Rich asked. "It sure as Wyrm stink isn't me!"

"Do we need one? I don't think we do." Mandy pursed her lips. Kevin finished a series of squats and began practicing the *Sepu Istu An*. Run, jump, staff, turn and begin again....

"You're the alpha!" Joné was laughing. "You have to be. You started it!"

"I am not some kind of patriarchal authority figure. I think it's an outmoded idea." She folded her arms defiantly.

"Outmoded?" Hack growled. "No wonder you homids don't breed with wolves. You don't even try to understand them."

"Hack, please. Look, no offense, Mandy, but you're crazy. How can we do anything with no one at the center, no one to see all? You got us together, got us here. You're not dominating us. You can't make us do things. But we need you. Someone. Someone to intersee, not oversee. Someone to subvise, not supervise. That's what I mean." Joné was serious, Visor pushed into a pocket. Hack nodded. Mandy sighed in the heat and sprayed herself with water before continuing.

"I... thanks. Thanks, everyone. Look, I don't want to tell people what to do. It would take too long. But, yeah, I see what you mean. The Children have usually had leaders, alphas, whatever. But they don't get there by feeding people, like among the Bone Gnawers, or by fighting—" Kevin saw a man approaching at a distance.

"Like the Get." Hack showed interest. "And not birth, like the Fangs. So how?"

Mandy warmed to the topic. "Well, sometimes it's ad-hocracy. That's how Garret got the Knights of Gaia's Hand together. He was willing to stroke enough Full Moon egos to get a fighting force, Children and not. Sometimes the spirits choose, like Inanna got chosen."

"The Voice, the lady from Australia? I met her a little while ago." A marvel of spaced-out mysticism, Inanna had gathered a large following of Garou. Ringer was amazed that someone like her, spirits filling all her sight, could function in the daylight world at all.

"Yeah, she's... well, she sees too much, too clearly, to be sitting and watching. Others are the most popular. That's practical, because it means you can get others to listen to you. This tribe just has a lot of ways to run things, maybe because running things is such a pain in the ass. We recognize that leadership is a complex status." Kevin stopped the *Sepu Istu An* and moved to stand with his pack, staff in hand. A woman went by with a sign saying NEED SHROOMS! She passed another man, who looked at her with faintly disguised contempt, then approached the pack directly.

"Excuse me," the stranger said in slightly accented Garou, "Moon shine always on you. I am Ten Bulls, and come with news. Who is your great blessed alpha?"

"I... I am. A star shines on the hour of our meeting, Ten Bulls. I am Amanda." The human names sounded odd in the Garou sentence.

"Your fame goes far, Amanda." Clearly it hadn't if he didn't know her deed name, but he was being polite. "Four Winds Howl sends his greetings and bids you to the council fire at moonrise. The Pipe will pass among us then. Is it your pleasure to attend?"

"It is... we'd be honored, yes." She nodded.

"May Mother keep you till then." He loped off toward another campsite.

The First Share of the Kill for the Greatest in Station

"That was weird," said Joné. "Who was that?"

"Another Gibbous Moon. We aren't always so florid," replied Amanda. "Now who wants to go?" They all did, even Rich. "Yeah, there are a lot of old forms of courtesy you'll see sometimes. The whole 'share the kill' thing, y'know."

"Well, I've hunted." Hack growled. "And there's a reason for that one too. Food isn't always plentiful. The strong need to be strong. Someone in the pack has to be in fighting form."

"Social Darwinism, dammit. Well," Amanda insisted, "I'm not a wolf. And I don't hunt for my food. So what good is that to me?"

"It's about sharing, period." Rich was sitting by the fire's ashes. "About portioning out. You said the leaders aren't always the old, the strong, the lucky. Well, if the greatest gets the first share, then he should *use* it for the good of the tribe. Maybe he needs to feed his warriors. Maybe mothers, maybe the poor among the Kin. Maybe he is wise enough to know what to do with it. And it's not just about deer's meat. It's everything. It's your damn passion for social justice, okay?"

"You two-legs turn the Litany upside down!" Hack growled. "It is the truth, not grass to be twisted and woven."

"It's words. If they mean something different to me, you've no right to call me wrong."

Ye Shall Not Eat the Flesh of Humans or Wolves

"You won't argue that the Litany's precept against eating The Forbidden is mistaken, surely!" Hack was trotting round the campsite with agitation. Kevin had gone back to the *Mahasu Qatu*.

"No. Save for the starving. If we eat our own kind, we're bad as Black Spirals, or worse."

"Well, Mandy," Joné said thoughtfully, "just about every human society I ever heard of has rules against eating human flesh, most human flesh, most of the time. So is that one also a command not to 'eat' people by taking away their food? What they need to live?"

"Yeah... we should speak on that, at the moot. It's a good thought." Ringer twirled his staff, then Hack caught it in his teeth, the two playing tug-of-war for a while.

Respect Those Beneath You — All Are of Gaia

"You especially have to watch it about Kin and ordinary humans." Amanda spoke as Ringer sprawled exhausted. "You can do things they can't, but there's a reason we have the Gifts, our strength and our shapeshifting powers. Mother let us have them to protect Her, and to protect the weak. Never hurt one wantonly, and especially do all you can to protect our Kin. Remember Sam Haight! He taught us a lesson about what happens when we ill-treat the humans and wolves we came from."

"The Get are beneath us, beneath our contempt, at least. Do we respect them?" Rich was smiling.

"We show them respect — sometimes just by keeping our distance."

The Veil Shall Not Be Lifted

"This is the worst one for us. We're all of us closer to the humans than safety would wish... the Veil is weak for us." Hack walked with them toward the council ring, Umbral webs around the distant building reflecting Luna's light strangely.

"But that's the beautiful thing about the Children!" Mandy objected. "We can share Gaia's blessing with everyone. That's why she gave us this gift."

"That would be why thieves for medlabs took my mother's pack? Why humans killed eleven Children that I've known? When other Garou would send them screaming, the protection of Gaia is missing... maybe your blood's too thin or something, but it sure is no blessing."

Kevin knew that the Crinos form of the Children of Gaia still sent humans into screaming fits. Even among Kin, some could not look at the man-wolf, or didn't want to. If the other tribes caused something *worse*, then the Garou must truly be alone. How could anyone truly know, much less love, a being that killed at the drop of a hat, that none could look upon? *I'm lucky to have Hack, I guess. Lucky to have anyone at all.*

Lucky in his pack. It was the Garou way.

Do Not Suffer Thy People to Tend Thy Sickness

The pack sat in Council on the grass of Woodstock's Umbra. Raised-By-A-Power, Galliard of the Mother's Eye Sept, wheezed and tottered into the circle on the shoulders of two cubs. Even with the Glabro form's additional strength, she could barely walk. Mandy cried, "That's Raised-by-a-Power. Have you ever heard her howl? She saw Jacob Morningkill on his throne! She must be a hundred and ten now... my grandmother studied High Tongue with her and she was old even then."

The ancient Garou wore a great woolen shawl even in summer heat. She reached the center of the ring and broke into a thin, wavering howl, head thrown back. Ringer sat, rapt in the ululating beauty of the tone, the way that she poured herself into each flowing passage.

The circle was long silent after she was done, then others took up the call, voices folding and twisting, some singing overtones in almost Tibetan style, harmony piling on harmony as the Children howled to the eternal mother. The prayers of the Inner Sky were brief; there was business at hand.

"The Litany says not to tend the sick. But did they mean... old people?"

Hack pondered for a while as Garou made speeches and argued. "I think that it meant not to waste resources.

"The old way was to leave the sick and weak to die. But it was always a pack's decision, a sept's. Never something that everyone had to do. After all, the wording speaks to the ailing Garou and tells him not to be a burden; it doesn't condemn others for volunteering to help."

"Our elderly do not suffer us to tend them. We choose to do so. Raised-By-A-Power had stomach cancer five years ago." Mandy was serious-faced. "She was ill for a long time and the Crescent Moon spent much to heal her. She has taught four apprentices since then. The sept needed her; she'll go someday soon anyhow."

Ringer nodded. There was no merit to losing a hero because he stubbed his toe or got sick. Gaia needed every Child who could do anything at all for her.

It wouldn't be a problem for him, he didn't think. Ahroun didn't usually get old.

The Leader May Be Challenged at Any Time During Peace

"Mandy, you say you're not a leader, but what would you do if we ever ran into bad trouble? Fomori, Black Spirals, those crazy humans with burning baseball bats? In battle, you need one person in charge." Ringer sat in the council ring with Hack's head in his lap. This way, Ringer thought, this shape, he's just an animal. My animal companion. Nothing sexual. Strange... shapeshifting is more than most Garou think.

"Step back and let you tell us what to do. You're the hero. You should know."

"Huh. Maybe I will. I think we might want some practice... join me if you want to."

"The Children of Gaia," announced a Philodox that Ringer didn't know, "have always held to the Litany. I therefore challenge True Silverheels for dominance before Gaia and Garou. He seeks to turn the Children toward such passivity that the Evil One will crush us. Hear me. I am Winter-Stars, Half Moon of the Knights of Gaia's Hand." An Amazon War veteran, then.

"How will they do this?" Ringer asked. "Just fight?"

"Probably not. We have too many other ways to settle disputes.

True Silverheels of the Sept of the Hand of Gaia arose from among his packmates and stepped to the center of the ring; Hack went to where Half Moons were gathering to judge. Ringer wondered how many years collectively had gone to legal wrangling while species went extinct daily. *Gaia, forgive us for the snail darter.* In the distance, a band was playing. He couldn't tell who.

The Leader May Not Be Challenged During Wartime

The two heroes circled in the council ring. They disputed judges, argued over what gamecraft was appropriate. Finally a Garou approached armed and in jungle fatigues. "Warriors of Gaia! War not with each other. Winter-Stars, let us return to our seats. There is much that we must attend to." Rich sat bolt upright, startled into Crinos.

"Mule! That's Garret Faithful! Look, Ringer!" Ringer saw the hero lead Winter-Stars toward the ranks of chairs that the Knights had erected. Garret's ash-blond hair and kingly features made him as hard to ignore as a battlefield flare. A female Knight sat by Winter-Stars and spoke into his ear.

"So his alpha can just call him off like that?" Ringer was curious.

Rich leaned closer. "He called war discipline on him. The Knights are fighting down there in the Amazon; Garret can't be challenged until the Garou withdraw. Believe me, he's not power hungry. But he's the only one they'll listen to." As well as a hero to Full Moons, Rich didn't add. That made sense, Ringer thought. No anarchists in foxholes.

"Especially not in a sacred place. That's the biggest rule of all."

You Shall Take No Action That Causes a Caern to be Violated

"This is a caern here? At Woodstock?" Joné looked at a display of Gnosis on her Visor's screen. "Is there someone here all the time?"

"No, the caern is further away. There used to be one here, probably a Croatan spirit-mound. I don't know the sept. I know at the original Woodstock a spirit came, Smoke Ring; he was happiest when everyone was wasted. This is a powerful place, no lie. I think that Justice and Pearl want to see if they can open the caern here... if there is even anything left. Somehow I doubt it; I mean, this festival wasn't spontaneous. It was funded, advertised, all that. Some of the people here are sincere, but it's not as sacred as it could have been." The moot was breaking up into songs and stories, Eric the guitarist and a girl with a flute setting up to play for the Garou.

"I think that the humans are safer with us here than not. I know, bringing humans and the People together like this is a little weird. But it can really dispel suspicion that there's something weird going on if people walk through a park and don't see anything strange. Hiding in plain sight has saved a lot of Garou."

"What if there's trouble?"

"Other tribes blame it on us 'breaking the Litany' again. Funny, when we save a caern they aren't as quick to praise us. Caerns and septs have to make these decisions themselves. So always ask if you bring someone, anyone. The Skinner may be dead but there are many just as bad."

The Pipe of Gaia passed, along with a firepot and tongs for lighting it with a coal. Ringer drew on it as it came to him: tobacco and kinnickinnick, traditional among the Children. He blew smoke, satisfied with the trip, with the pack, with Gaia.

Create and Pursue Peace Wherever You Can

"So Gaia doesn't, like, actually mind us fighting?" Ringer had called up pictures of Harpy knives into the Visor screen and was rotating them. The council had ended and the pack returned to their campsite.

"We need to avoid fighting. To seek peace, nonviolent—" A growl interrupted her.

"Gaia isn't nonviolent. Wolverines kill for pleasure and cats torture mice." Hack's tail showed him frowning. "The idea of pursuing peace is something that Mandy and I look at differently. But war, human war, is something neither of us likes. Ants fight, but they don't waste continents doing it."

Mandy spoke again. "This is the precept of the Litany that makes us different from the other tribes. We take on an extra precept to remind us that we are Gaia's defenders, and that one of the ways we fight for Her is to seek peace."

A Child's Garden of Wolves

Stereotypes

"So what about the other tribes?"

Mandy took on the air of a lecturer, saying "There are no other tribes. All Garou are children of Gaia. The others do not understand this, and the Garou suffer for it."

Ringer sighed. "Okay, how about this. What about the other Garou? The ones who don't follow Unicorn? I really need to know this stuff, so can we drop the politics?"

Black Furies

"Well, the closest to us are really the Black Furies. They send their Garou sons to us. Like Hack. His dam, The-Motion-of-Light-in-Water, she's a Fury lupus who

runs with a pack down in Virginia. Pupped at Sunset Sea caern and left him, only Garou she ever birthed. We are really one tribe: 'Unicorn and Pegasus leave the same hoofprint,' as the Crescent Moons say. Their numbers diminish as the years go by. Not surprising when they're all women and all warriors. If the Twelve Tribes are to fight the War of the Apocalypse together, we had best hurry."

"They're all women? Are they lesbos? This sounds crazy."

"No, they hate the way men treat women — they remember every tale of rape or gang-rape, forced marriages, slavery, things like that. And no, they aren't a tribe of lesbians; most I know are hetero. They keep some of their sons, after all: the metis. Really, they're a warrior society more than a tribe. And they *are* mad women: mad about the cruelty of men, about the ruin of the wild. Good friends, but don't get too close."

Bone Gnawers

Ringer stroked Hack's wolf fur, thinking that he was close enough to Fury flesh and blood when he did so. "I won't. I met some Bone Gnawers once and they seemed like great guys. We were passing a bottle of shine round and telling dirty stories... why are you looking at me that way?"

"The Gnawers are good allies. Just... a little tacky. I mean, they have fleas. Some of them."

Ringer suppressed an urge to scratch. "Well, I liked them. Down to earth, maybe."

Rich growled. "They are the best friends I ever had. Gnawers spoke for me in moot when Children of Gaia would not. They love metis as well as two-legs. Honor to the sons of Rat!" He seemed to consider the matter settled.

Fianna

"Rich, your mother was of the Fianna, as you told us." Joné leaned forward. "What are they really like?"

"They are my mother's tribe, not mine. They love drink, war, honor, singing. They love the good things in life, but they scorn the bad things — as they define them. They hate metis and all the Fera. They would have let my mother die birthing and then let me die. I don't own them as my people."

Mandy said, "The Fianna are good warriors, but Gaia needs peace. They are great revelers, but Gaia needs hard work. They need to know that great tales are spun of peace; we could win them with such words. Still, they are closer to us than most other tribes... keep Rich's words in mind. There's another tribe you should worry about, though....

Get of Fenris

"The Get? Why?" asked the younger woman. "They're the Germans... Scandahoovians, whatever, right? Are they all crazy? Nazi types?"

"Most Get I know would pull your intestines out through your throat for calling them Nazis. They believe in the strong dominating the weak, but the way this one Get put it, they thought the Nazi party was governed by the weak. But as for being crazy — well, yeah. They are given to war, enough that I fear Beast-Of-War lives in them. They hate us for seeking peace, hate all humans—"

"Wolves too. I know," said Hack.

"—Who aren't 'pure' enough for them. So wolves that are part dog, humans who are, well, anything but white, they don't like. And Ringer — they don't like gay people either, even when the Get practice some... violent homo-stuff themselves. Maybe if they saw how strong we are in different ways, how hard we struggle, that what we seek is purer than anyone's hate, purer than anyone's race, that peace is stronger than giving in to Rage, maybe then they would struggle as hard for peace as for victory. Maybe."

Glass Walkers

"Now, the Glass Walkers are more like us. They love the city; we just don't mind it. We want peace; I don't know what they want. But they get a lot of crap from the other tribes for being too close to the Weaver, just like we do. And they are Weaverish , So trust a Walker, but not too closely. Okay?"

"Okay," Ringer had met a few Glass Walkers. Cool and easy to get along with, not like you'd think. Joné, now, was almost one herself with her website and her wolfcam.

Red Talons

Hack said, "Now, there's a tribe you haven't mentioned. Ringer, stay the hell away from the Red Talons."

"The who?"

"They're a tribe of lupus, all lupus, all the time. And they mean it! They hate everything human, hate the human half of themselves. I have known a few, and they were angry with me, even, because I live with humans. I don't know what they will do when there's no wilderness left: for them, really, the Apocalypse is right now. And we're part of it."

Shadow Lords

"The caern where we couldn't stop, in Ohio... Mandy, who are the Shadow Lords?"

"The Garou of the Slavic nations. "'Kings of ebony darkness', at least in their own imaginations. They're really more like kings of the spoiled potato salad. They love telling other Garou what to do, and they boss their Kin around really badly. A lot of their Kin leave, even go to other tribes. They love darkness, dark magic; it all stinks."

"Why haven't the other tribes gotten rid of them if they're that bad?"

She sighed, and there was a long pause before she answered. "Because they're good at what they do. Because they can think like our enemies, even to the point of outmaneuvering them. Because they play politics so well that people figure they don't mind Shadow Lords being manipulative if the sept alliances wind up stronger for it. Because they have a long history of getting their hands dirty when other tribes would balk at doing something dishonorable, even if it was for the good of the Nation. Because some people are scared of challenging them. Because we need all the help we can get. Can we talk about somebody else?"

Silver Fangs

"The Silver Fangs, on the other hand, are pretty decent except for their crazy hero stuff. King Albrecht, now, he's brave as the day is long. If they'd help us make peace between the tribes, maybe we'd have a chance. A lot of Garou really respect them."

"I thought you hated patriarchal authority figures?" Joné's smile was teasing.

"Well, like Hack pointed out, those Garou with strong wolf blood respect authority. They like strong alphas. The Silver Fangs are just the ones who happen to have the traditional reputation as strong leaders, even if it's not always accurate.

Silent Striders

"Speaking of respect, the Striders deserve some. If you meet a lone Garou, especially a long way from everything, he's likely a Silent Strider. Pretty tough customers. You'll meet some someday, maybe. They're wanderers, go from caern to caern, sept to sept. They know a lot of secrets."

Uktena

"Really? I thought the greatest mystics were the Uktena."

"Well, they know a lot too. They will work with us readily enough, but they keep what they want to know to themselves. We are alike in a lot of ways. We both want justice more than fighting, and we both take in all the world's peoples. But they're not really about breaking down boundaries the way we are — the way they tell it, there are some things better left as an individual's burden." She shook her head. "And the way they put it, I'm not inclined to disagree."

Wendigo

"So they're not exclusively Native American any more?"

"Nope. The Uktena are pretty pragmatic that way. Now, the Wendigo are not like that. They want war, want death, really. As often as we go to them seeking aid, they send us back with insults. I don't know how many Wendigo are left; the only one who has an open history of dealing with Unicorn's people these days is a white boy, and I wonder if he speaks for the rest of the tribe. Maybe there are more like him. Maybe not."

Stargazers

"Haven't we missed a tribe?"

"No, they missed us. Or maybe we failed them. Or something. Oh, Gaia…." She paused. "You have no idea how badly the elders were shaken up when the Stargazers left."

"Left? You mean, they weren't exterminated? They just quit?"

"No, they didn't quit — well, they didn't quit being Garou. They just quit the Garou Nation. They were losing a lot of ground back in their homelands, the way I heard it; Tibet, you know. So the Stargazers drifted further and further from us. Eventually they just left, the few hundred that were all that remained of the tribe. It hit us pretty hard." She sighed heavily. "I mean, we do all these things to try and get the tribes working together, and all of a sudden a tribe says 'Thanks, your help will no longer be required.' It was like… it was like being told flat-out that we'd failed, that we were no good. That they didn't trust us to get their backs, or that we couldn't convince them the Nation was worth the effort. And of all the tribes, they were the closest to us ideologically, I think. It hurt. It hurt bad. And you're left there like you'd just gone through an awful breakup, wondering 'was it me?'"

The Beasts

There was an uncomfortable pause then, before Ringer made a try to change the subject.

"Mandy, you talked about the Wars of Rage before. Do the Children of Gaia have any contact with the Fera, I hear folks call them?"

"All that we can. Some will not speak to any Garou, even to us. Some find us their preferred negotiators; others find more kinship with other tribes, like the Gnawers. It's always tense going."

Ananasi

"There are spider people, and they have nothing to do with us. Spider people. How weird is *that*? As tales say that they drink blood, drink only blood, this is perhaps best. I hear they're not even Gaia's people — that they're children of the Weaver more than anything else.

I don't believe it — after all, it was that kind of short-sightedness that made Garou believe the Dragon People were of the Wyrm — but from all I've heard, the spider people have never acted friendly toward any Garou, or even acted like they wanted revenge. They're just... on the outside, as much a myth as anything else."

Bastet

"There *are* Bastet left, though. The great cats. I've caught the scent of one, a cougar-kin down south in the Sierra Nevadas. They're an aloof people themselves; I understand the ones in Africa tend to be more inclined to talk with Garou, since it's their homeland and they have less to fear from werewolves there. But in the Americas, the Bastet are cougar and jaguar breed — and neither one is particularly friendly. I've heard tell that from all the watching they do, they're well aware of the divisions between tribes, and I've heard rumors that angry Bastet stalked and killed a pack of Garou, sparing only one of the Children of Gaia — but rumors only, no proof. They're a proud folk. If you ever meet one, be polite and respectful, and don't approach anything looking like their territory unless invited."

Corax

"Are there any shapeshifters that *aren't* proud to a fault?"

Mandy smiled. "Just one bunch I can think of — the Corax. Raven-shifters. Some of them act like Raven from the Native American stories, all wise and insightful; others are more easy-going. I met one once; it was the only other Fera I've ever seen. But they're close to us, the Corax — as close as any Fera can ever be to a Garou. They remember our old role as peacemakers, and don't blame us for failing to do enough. They know a lot — they fly high, and they see almost everything. Almost everything. There are a few things even the Corax can't find."

Gurahl

"Like?"

"Like the Gurahl."

"They were the Sons of the Bear, right?"

"Yeah. They perished in the Wars of Rage. They were Mother's healers. Everything we do is just a poor shadow of what they were allegedly capable of; if the War of Rage hadn't happened and the Gurahl hadn't been exterminated, some say Gaia wouldn't have chosen us to be Her new healers. But we're not the originals. She needs them now, more than ever. The Wars might have doomed Mother; would that we were better peace-knotters."

Mokolé

"Lost to us as well are the Mokolé — snake, lizard, alligator. They died, pretty much all of them, long ago. We know almost nothing of them."

"But the Glass Walker guy said, in Australia, he found some, alive, the Great Dragons." Joné was excited. "If any are alive... the prophecy! Maybe it could come true!"

"Seekers! Go find that tale-teller, and hear what he has to say. Maybe he can lead you to the Dragon Folk; maybe they want to be left alone." She smiled ruefully. "But Gaia knows, we could all use some good news."

Ratkin

"It's kind of ironic, I guess, that the Gurahl are gone and the Ratkin aren't. Gaia's healers are gone — Her force for population control is still working at it."

"Ratkin? Wererats? They're still around?"

"Yep. The Bone Gnawers get all tight-lipped on the subject, which is kind of proof in itself; if the Ratkin were dead, what would they have to hide? So they must still be around; you don't see them because they don't want you to. They spread sickness, destroy people's food! They have no use for us at all. What does a rat care for peace? But when West Nile virus breaks out in Massachusetts, or a building collapses in Kenya... they still watch over humans, still kill and destroy."

"They sound pretty evil."

"They do, but really they're just rats. That's all."

Rokea

"And then there are the sharks. People say they're evil, too, but they're not. They don't hold any grudges against us; I don't know if they think about us at all. It's not that we slaughtered them, because we didn't. There is simply nothing to discuss. They keep to sea, we to land. Simple as that."

Others

"So if some of the Fera act like enemies and others are kind of like friends, what's that mean for the others?"

"The others?"

"You know." Joné looked a little embarrassed. "The *others*."

"Ah."

Vampires

"I suppose you know from all the ballads of great heroes opposing the Leeches that vampires are real."

"The Wyrm's slaves. Destroy them." Hack was the Judge, cold as winter moon.

"Hack, you ever tried to get permission to build something in a city? Ever been to an art museum? Ever made deals with the Glass Walkers? Yeah, vampires might be evil and pretty crazy, but they own a lot of stuff. So keep in mind that Gaia's peace isn't just about Garou."

"You tread on cracking ice."

"Look, think about it. Some of them have been around for as long as our tribe has been a tribe. Think about all the things they must know, all the stories they could tell. Can't you see just how much we could gain if we actually managed to make peace with them?"

The lupus' eyes were hard and cold. "I suppose there aren't enough stories of Children of Gaia deciding to try trusting their most ancient enemies and getting stabbed in the back for their trouble? Not enough stories about us getting massacred for opening our arms to *real* monsters? You want to write a few more?" He locked eyes with Mandy for a moment, then looked away. "Fine. Go ahead. Dream your dreams."

"Okay, we get it, vampires," Ringer hastily interjected. "Are there more?"

Mages

"There are. A lot of the old stories about shapeshifting shamans and wise magic-workers are obviously based on us, right? But there are humans who can do this sort of thing, too. For them, all those occult books and kabalistic rituals are real. They're a wild bunch. They're basically humans with Gifts, Kin and otherwise. I don't know what spirits give them the Gifts: maybe their own spirits do it. Some of them, the ones who walk in dreams, the ones who call to the Old Blood, they're not so bad. But the rest are dangerous. They drink off the life from caerns, evil or crazy, I don't know which. Avoid them if you can."

Hunters

"Not all of them work magic in the same way, though." Joné commented, tapping on her screen as she did so, "I've heard of something new. Not mages. Not all of them hostile — sometimes they just don't understand. They're hunting us, really. Blindly." She turned the little Visor and showed them a snapshot of an elderly woman lifting a Crinos Garou off the ground, the huge furry form frozen. Underneath was a small child's body. "Some kind of powers, from Gaia knows where... watch out. We can't always counter them."

Wraiths

"These are ghosts, like on Halloween. The Striders are said to speak to them. I'm glad I'm not a Strider. Restless Dead. Yeesh."

"I would know more. There is knowledge that I would have of them. Where can these Strider adepts be found?" Rich leaned closer to the fire.

"I dunno. They're always moving round. Joné, ever see Striders on WyrdWolf?"

"Uh... yeah. There's one who posts from a palmtop whenever he can afford a web café: Mallorca, Piraeus, Jebal Ali, Goa. Another hacks into phonelines. But, hey, I see ghosts on the net sometimes too: people, posting, when I know they're dead. So maybe, packmate, we can try looking there."

"I will ask for your help. Thank you."

Changelings

"Hey, Rich, how much do you know about the Fianna stories of the fairies?"

"The Good Folk? Damn little. Just enough to understand that they're not talking about pixies that come out when you've had too much to drink."

"No, they're real," added Mandy. "I don't know much more except that they live in some kind of freaked-out alternate reality; under mounds and inside little rings of white mushrooms. Joné, you know any more?"

The younger woman shook her dreadlocked head. "Uh-uh. Lots of stuff the Fianna are always saying; some say they can imagine anything they want and make it real, some say that they live in invisible castles. Don't know much about them; they don't have email in Fairyland."

Umbra and Unicorn

Ringer walked beyond the crowd, into the emptiness between the airstrip and the chainlink fence. Mandy strolled beside him, Garou sight making them surefooted even in the almost-darkness. "Unicorn, huh?"

"Yeah, One-Horn's the big guy. Gal."

"What is with that? Seems pretty wimpy for a totem spirit."

"I don't know. She's been with us a long time, since Babylon, Sumer, all that, when she was *Rimi* for us, fighting *Sirrush*, the Dragon of the Ishtar Gate. She is Gaia's Love made real, healer, whole-er, balancer. We aid the weak, seek for justice, defend the oppressed in his name. She's a fierce fighter too — that horn is *sharp*."

"I thought... you know, unicorns and rainbows...." Ringer grinned.

"You handle the rainbow crap, kiddo. Just know this: defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. Strike for the good and the true, that's Unicorn's way."

"So Unicorn's pretty tough, eh? You ever see her?"

"Yeah... she came through the caern one time years ago, when Summer took over from Concepcion, who was our Voice before her. We all were sitting in

the rocks near the caern's heart, and we saw flowers and weeds blowing... he came as a horse that day. His horn was as long as my arm. I was just a kid, so I didn't know why my mom and dad held each other so tight. The other time I saw her was in the Homeland, but I was only there a little while. She's everywhere there: each person sees her differently."

"I... dream sometimes about her... well, him, I think. That he's all wild, like with a lion's mane. He doesn't even look like a unicorn, really. He's got a lot of power, speed. It's... exciting."

"That's great, Ringer. Yeah, everyone sees her differently; she's not really male or female, but we see what we expect."

"You mentioned the Homeland. What... is that like?"

"Like peace, like home. It's supposed to be like Earth was before the Wyrm fell. Who knows? It's beautiful, peaceful. Your moon is always in the sky, forests of game, rivers of fish, fruits and berries and stuff. There are Kin who live there all the time, usually people who would have died if they'd stayed on Earth. You always see Unicorn, and she's always... like you. If you're a warrior, she — or he is strong and proud, big and buff. If you're a delicate artsy type, she's slight and pale. Mine? Major quarterhorse action, pure country club." She laughed. "But Kareema Okavanga's was a zebra with a horn. So you never know. But I never went back to the Homeland. Too much work here. I mean, Paradise, it's cool, but there are no problems, nothing to do, really."

"Sounds nice. I'm too busy as it is." Ringer wondered: endless peace, endless rest. Was it death that she described? "What about this Summer Country everyone was talking about the other night when Bruce brought out that really great mead?"

"The Summer Country is a perfect place of Gaia's love made real. Basically one giant bubble bath or something. It is supposed to be a place where there is no hatred, suffering or evil. Only catch is that to enter, you have to experience and accept the Mother's love perfectly." She took a deep breath, stepped over a stone. "I've never been there." There was a wistful note in her voice. "It does sound nice, doesn't it. Like Heaven, I guess." Then she turned round on the darkened grassy field. "Well, shall we go on back?" She strode toward the camping area, and Ringer followed.

The crowd roared and surged: like the waves off Mendocino or at Sunset Sea, Ringer thought. He could feel the music vibrating in his guts, feel the motion of the pit-and something else. Yelling with the others, he tried to sort it out. What was different here?

Gnosis.

It was weak, but it was there. Packed in so close, bodies hitting each other, he could feel Gaia's power in the humans, Kin and Garou who danced to Metallica. Shirtless, sweat-slick, he wondered whether humans could feel this too. Kin could sometimes, he knew. It felt... strong, not as strong as a caern's heart, but remarkably connecting all the same. He was by the sound booth, on the edge of the crowd.

The power he felt gave him an idea. He'd never tried this, wouldn't try it, but... the energy was positive, the crowd so connected, so gathered. "Yo, dude, give me a leg up, willya?" Ringer took off his shoes and stuffed them in his pockets. *Will I get dropped? Will I get stepped on?* Rage could heal him if he wanted it to, but humans could get hurt badly.... The guy held out his cupped hands and Ringer stepped up and onto... nothing.

Hands everywhere rose, held him up. He tensed at all the hands, along his back, his ass, his legs, then — try to relax. Let the power earth itself. He got his bearings from a painting on the peace wall, of the world supported by the hands, paws, hooves, of a hundred species of creatures. *It's cool, no one's gonna let you fall. No one's gonna hurt you.* It was like a massage, all those hands, a flight of hands, all over him. *I'm not in control.* Then, stranger, *No one's in control. No one is pushing me anywhere; it's the crowd, the will of the crowd... strange.* He was caressed, flying, hands touching him, anonymous, supporting, trusting. Earlier he'd seen a guy fall before, and the crowd part and help him up. He'd never seen that at a concert before. He let the Gnosis of the crowd (from where, he wondered?) wash over him. *Incredible, like kissing,* he thought. *But they're both about letting someone touch you, both about trust, I guess.*

The stage loomed ahead and a bouncer pushed him away before he could land there. The crowd carried him back and then many hands lowered him down, that flying feeling refusing to leave.

The band finished "Fade to White" and the crowd screamed its approval, Ringer joining, listening to the interplay of a thousand voices. What message hid there, that no one person knew?

"Have a good time?" It was Rich, shirtless in the sticky heat and big as a mountain. Hard to look at his huge Homid form and think that his Crinos was half again as big.

"Gaia, it's so fun! I could feel —," *The Veil! Protect the Veil!* he thought, "— the energy. It was really positive, really charged me up." The older man laid an arm on his shoulder, shook him gently.

"Yeah, I can feel it. You gonna stay for more?"

"Sure, might just sit for a while. Uh... you can stay too."

They sat and listened to the band, watched the dancing crowd, and Ringer wondered again at the

sensation of crowdsurfing. Awesomely damn fly. And more than that....

"Rich, the power, you said I was full of it, right?"

"You're usually full of it, packmate."

"Yeah, thanks, asshole. Okay, look, when I was surfing, was that, like, a connection to Gaia? Like, when I was floating, kinda, on top of all those guys, all those people, was I, all like connecting to Gaia through them? Can that happen?"

Rich frowned, visibly putting on his official role as a Theurge while a guitar solo wound on and on. "Yeah. It can, like in the Rite of... some rites. I know rites where you can do that. If there's a lot of Gnosis floating round from humans, Garou, even the spirits."

"Were there spirits in that crowd?"

"It can happen, yeah. An Uktena I know used to study with some wonder-workers, voodoo chicks, and they said that spirits always come when the drumming's good. That's probably how it used to be, when the spirits had an easier time connecting with people, but now it's a lot rarer. Most humans just don't get the spirit connection — they walk on the land, not with it." He looked out across the crowd. "I felt it, too. A bit. More than there should have been. Maybe the spirits were there, shedding Gnosis like... like body heat."

"Wow, freaky. Why would they do that?"

"I think — here's something that spirits do. They come to a mortal, like us. They want to see with our eyes, feel what we feel. Like if you're wasted or with some chick — or some guy or whoever, they want in." The two Garou both laughed. "Sorry." Rich had had a couple of beers, Ringer realized. Or more. "So they come down, the drums — that's what I've heard — open the door up for them, and they come, ride the people, get what they want. So they might spill a little Gnosis on the crowd in return, or just because they feel good."

"Awesome. You ever crowdsurf?"

"Naw. Big guy like me can't."

Rich looked away, and Ringer realized that Rage was the reason, not size. Rich, Wyrm-foe, werewolf and wonder-maker, was afraid. Not for himself, for humans, for soft fragile humans who'd be torn to bits when Rich's anger erupted. *Damn. I never saw it in him.* He felt sorry for the great metis, then vaguely guilty. *It could have happened with me, too. With any of us, and I just went and did it anyway like I wasn't afraid. And he didn't stop me because he trusted me — more than he trusts himself. I wish... Rich could see how good a man he really is.* It was a thought to wish on, to work on. It was a good thought. They sat there silently then, enjoying the humans, enjoying Gaia.

Ringer was walking to the porta-showers that the festival had set up. Maybe, he thought, I'm too human. Hack doesn't even care how I smell....

"Hey, you're with Joné Palladino's pack, right?" It was Soldier-of-Paradise, towel over his shoulders.

"Yeah. Kevin. Ringer, I guess, here. Uh, good story, the one about Crete." Why, Ringer wondered, am I so tongue-tied?

"Thanks, whatever. Just somethin' I heard from that professor. Hey, glad you guys made it. Knew Joné from a while back — who all else is with you?" The Ragabash carried a spongebag; the ragged T-shirt he wore showed the flames and snakes inked into his shoulders. Was it a kid's craziness that got him the tattoos, Ringer wondered, or the urge to take all the pain without Raging, or something more?

"Mandy Barret, she's the alpha, I guess, and Rich, the big guy, and Snow Falling on Hackberries. Hack." Why, Ringer wondered, do I feel light as a feather, just saying his name?

"Yeah, I met y'all. Hey, it's none'a my business," the little man went on in his maybe-Oklahoma drawl, "but you and the wolf... you two together?"

Why not tell him the truth? Not like he's gonna mess with me, Ringer thought. His heart still flip-flopped, from a life in the closet. "Yeah, he's... I mean, we're..."

"Yeah. I could tell. Hey, it's awright. Just... you know, don't be a shit about it. You know? And—."

"Yeah?"

Soldier-of-Paradise was grinning. "It makes you happy, man. It makes you fuckin' glow. I can see that, and I don't even *know* you. That's really cool."

Ringer went on to wash up, wondering what the trickster had really said, really meant. Joné was making coffee on the little camp stove when he returned. "Want some?"

"Sure." He rummaged in his tent and found a mostly clean cup. The shower and shave had done wonders for his self-esteem. "What's up?"

"Just talked to Peter, the guy that met the Dragons. I got his email for the Seekers list... we talked a long time."

"So what did you learn?" She poured two cups, added sugar to hers. Ringer smelled vanilla and hazelnut.

"He really did meet the Dragons, in South America and in Australia. They told him a bunch of stuff, because they have some kind of power that lets them remember anything through time. But I asked him if the Dragons would know anything about the lost tribes. More than anyone alive, he said. So I asked to go with him; he said he'd see. Imagine what we could learn, imagine talking to them!"

"Yeah. Sounds cool. I'd go, you know. Just to see them, I guess. Say, where are we all going after this?"

"You know about Seattle, right?"

"Sort of. It's going to be some big protest against, what, the government?"

"Not really. It's about the World Trade Organization, this big thing that regulates international trade, really just a way for corporate hotshots to trash poor countries and people's lives for their own wallets. So a lot of us, from all over, are going to see if we can shut down the meeting."

"We're all going to go?" *Never been the political type*, Ringer thought.

"You can if you want to. I know Mandy, Rich and I want to go."

"We'll go too." *We*, Ringer realized. *We*. My... partner and I. Sweet.

"Great. If you want to look at the planning files, they're here...."

Around The World

TEA Okay, Jo, I'm here.

HELLO_KITTY kewl. you got the list?

TEA Are you sure this is secure? And I can't believe you're using that alias.

HELLO_KITTY it's safe. and i'm the master of many faces out here :) you have the list?

TEA Yes. I'm FTPing it now. This Seattle thing is going to be huge.

HELLO_KITTY yeah. you sure about this? i've been getting some crazy responses from all around the world. i didn't know the cog were spread out like this.

TEA Me too. Great, isn't it? We're gonna get the great unwashed together and shut these fuckers down. So who have you heard from?

England

HELLO_KITTY you want the great unwashed? their british representative actually got online with me. just a sec...

HELLO_KITTY here. i'm uploading the transcript. i think you'll like him.

BEGIN TRANSCRIPT

SCOOBY where you from Matt?

MADDENINGMATT England.

SCOOBY no shit? i thought that was fianna land.

MADDENINGMATT Yeah, there aren't many of us. We're part of a little group called the Green Laners. We and a few Bone Gnawers've got a caern out by Leyton-on-the-Twee, north of the big sept at Brighton. It isn't much but we call it home. Fact, we call all the green lanes home.

SCOOBY green lanes?

MADDENINGMATT Just like it sounds. Roads of grasslands untouched by the Weaver, save for a few standing stone markers. Been here since the Diggers, Will Everard's lot back in Cromwell's time, givin' the land back to the people. We're fighting them tooth and claw as they try to pave them over to make it safe for lorries full of French beef. Taking our homes away too.

SCOOBY evicting you? is that legal?

MADDENINGMATT It is when you're squatting. They don't actually want the places we live in, they just don't want US living there. And by US I don't mean you and me, I mean all the "crusties" as they call us. The ones who hand to mouth, conning by night and getting dole by day. They're taking everything away out here — our heritage, our homes, our way of life. About the only thing left is our vote, and I bet they want that, too.

SCOOBY sound rough. probably won't make it to seattle, then? :) and where'd you get net access?

MADDENINGMATT Th' Sept of Tolerance at Brighton is sending a pack, but none of us can come. Sounds like a blast, though. Look out for the Swiss guys; they're deep into Davos' plots and they'll be there monkeywrenching. And as for the net access, well, we can take stuff, too. Speaking of which, gotta run. bye.

SCOOBY bye!

Mainland Europe

Dear Emily,

I know, I know, it's been a while. You know how it is, I'm afraid; rarely enough time to write. We keep so busy, busy, busy. I'd apologize yet again for being no kind of a husband to you, thanks to this damn war that will never end, but you'd smack me for it. So I'll just say that I miss you. More than ever.

You know, I always wanted to see Europe, back when I was a dumb kid. I figured the French would be rude to an American, and I expected it. Then, when I Changed, all those hopes went to hell — until I started rising in rank, and making little leaps of progress. So when I got the opportunity to come on over to Europe and try helping out with the mediations there, I couldn't say no. You knew all this already, right?

Well, this may be no surprise to you, but I guess I should have thought things through a little more. Don't get me wrong, the local Children have been just great — when I've been able to find them, that is. Turns out there are only two septs held by the Children that anyone knows about, and only *one* on the mainland! So although I've managed to stay as the occasional tribemate's houseguest once in a while, that doesn't get me a place of honor — or much of a place at all — at the local moots.

The war's bad over here. There's so little wilderness left, and the local humans (please don't get mad at me for saying that!) are squabbling over what's left. There's little room for wolves. And that means that the local tribes are all very much on the defensive. They don't have anywhere left to go. I think that's why the Children are persona non grata here, at least in so many septs — the Get and Fianna and Fangs and Lords and Talons and Furies don't want anyone hanging around who might counsel compromise.

It's hard, baby. The biggest push for peace I've heard of, the one everyone's talking about over here, is led by a Shadow Lord. You remember Ballard? Yeah, his tribe. This guy, "the Margrave" they call him, is apparently managing to make Get of Fenris and Black Furies break bread together, whether they like it or not. He's getting things done by force of personality that the European Children haven't been able to do with persuasion and wise counsel for centuries. It doesn't make us look good, and we have to work twice as hard to get half the respect. The Margrave's official policy, I hear, is that he welcomes our help as expert negotiators and diplomats — I just wish that the locals cared more about official policy.

Anyway, I don't mean to bring you down. I'm alive, I'm well, I'm eating regularly. I think I can make a little progress here whether these hardheads want me to or not. And once I've fulfilled that promise, I'll be home with you again, baby. I can't wait. I really can't. Here's to me fulfilling my duty with all of Gaia's speed.

All my love,

Hector

Russia

From: "Andrei Chernenko" <acher@glasstown.net.ru>

To: "His Rich Antler" <richant@wyrdwolf.net>

Subject: re: Seattle

Date: Friday, November 19, 1999 3:47 PM

Hello Rich

Thank you for the directions. I am very eager to come to this rally, as I have no love for the WTO. The IMF has kept Russia addicted to its money like a pimp keeps one of your legendary American crack whores. Of course, these days America doesn't corner the market in the crack whore industry; we here in Russia have sadly been trying to catch up.

You had asked whether it was true that Mother Russia hated her children. I do not believe that is true, but sometimes I think that she isn't very well disposed towards the Children of Gaia. Our time here has been very poor of late. The near genocide practiced by the Red Talons during the Cold War would have been enough to consider our tribe cursed had it been the only act taken against us. But the Silver Fangs drove the knife deeper by standing idly by... because we had given them bad advice over thirty years before. If not for the Glass Walkers and Bone Gnawers, there might not have been any Children left in Russia at all.

And that was just the cold war. You mentioned that I was the first Russian Garou you had ever heard of, and there is a good reason for that. Until last year a Shadow Curtain veiled all that occurred in Russia from the rest of the world, and it had been there since 1991. It was the work of Baba Yaga, a witch more famous here than any seen in your Disney movies and far more real. For years the Garou Nation struggled against her and the Wyrm-spawn who followed her. Because of the treachery and lies we had been victim to in the past, no one save the Glass Walkers and Bone Gnawers would heed our advice. This cost them since their good fortune in the war made them look like collaborators; at least until one fifth of the Glass Walkers were killed by Baba Yaga herself. Now their loss matched that of the other tribes who had been losing caern after caern. If there was a bright point for us at all in this affair, it was when the Shadow Lords turned to our Voice, Alyosha Lyubov, to bring peace between them and the Silver Fangs and help unite the Garou.

Of course, as you can see now that the Shadow Curtain is lifted, we won. But it was not without price; many great heroes were lost to battle and much damage was inflicted to Russia physically and socially. In this case, though, we had no choice and now it is left to build from the rubble. We have but one caern in Russia, hidden in a place I cannot even reveal to you, but hopefully in the near future we will be able to build more. In the meantime most of us stay with our friends the Glass Walkers and Bone Gnawers. I write to you from a Glass Walker caern right now. May this fragile peace between the rest of the tribes last. Your words of your own land are encouraging.

Finally, you had asked a question for your friend Joné. I do not know any Gurahl personally, though there are some Children who still look for the lost healers of Gaia. Many feel that Mother Russia seems to hate us now because we lost the Gurahl. We strive for peace and healing, but I fear that the Children are poor substitutes for these lost ones. If she really is interested, tell your friend that there are legends of a gulag in Siberia that is frozen in time and of a sleeping shapeshifter there whose healing powers are greater than any known to Garou. The Wendigo there may just let her live.

Take care my friend, and I shall see you in Seattle.

— Andrei

The United States

Amanda said, "No nation has ever extended so many rights to so many people. Granted, things are far

from perfect, despite all that humans, Kin and Garou have done—."

"Specially for me." Ringer had never been fag-bashed but a friend, Cooper, had gotten beaten up so bad he was never the same....

"Yeah, I know. Lost a Kinfolk uncle to AIDS myself." Amanda went on. "But the United States and Canada are where the largest number of Children live and they are where we and our ideals have had a lot of success. Humans invent causes. And humans make their own history. But our backing has changed things. Summer in the Free Speech movement, Garret and Winter-Stars for the rain forest. We have a lot to contribute."

"The Children helped in the anti-slavery movement, didn't they?" Joné came to join them and sat down, smoothing the legs of her khaki cargo shorts as she did so.

"Yeah... funny thing. A human historian compared the census data in Ontario and found that only six thousand more blacks lived there in 1864 than in 1853. So he thought that the Underground Railroad either wasn't real or didn't work." She smiled. "Historians! If he only knew how many Garou led and Moon-Bridged slaves to safety, pulled them into the Umbra ahead of federal marshals, hid them in caerns, "employed" them to keep them safe, smuggled them to places lost in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan or down east in Maine woods.... Long after, we still couldn't tell the truth about it... too many were at risk who still lived, and our caern hearts aren't things for humans to know anyway. The Furies always helped women but they were too few to do much... the Children were more spread out and both Garou and Kin helped the slaves escape to freedom. Including," Amanda said to Joné, "a woman named Christmas Tucker." Joné was blank-faced. "Maum Chrish, your great-great-grandmother."

"I... I heard that name, a long time ago. But I didn't know who she was. Was she Kin?"

"At the end many were; to make the trip safely, and to hide slaves in caerns, we had to bring them inside the Veil. Maum Chrish became Kin at the Old Troy Caern in Ohio. Eleven living Garou are descended from her."

"Wow. What else have the Children done in the United States?"

"The peace movement, the free speech movement, gay people's freedom from discrimination, their freedom to have their marriages recognized, women's right to own property, to vote, to hold office, to breed —" her eyes dropped for a moment, "— when and where they want to. To free the Aleuts in Alaska, to give citizenship to our Uktena and Wendigo sib's Kinfolk. There are so many stories that I can't tell them all. I don't even know them all," Amanda said. "So look for them yourself. Or —."

"Make them up?" The no-moon twinkled in Joné's eyes.

"Yeah, America's not exactly paradise, but it's the best anyone could do, really. Humans make their own history, but we're at least half human. Even you, Hack."

Near East

Ringer could hear Ziggy Marley rocking on the airstrip as he tried to fit a rod into a sleeve on a tent that would smell bad anyway when it was around him. Should sleep in the open. Guess I'm too shy. Footsteps crunched on the mulch near him.

Joné said "You know, Ringer, the MP3s of the stories came out great. If you want, you can listen to them... the ones that they told while you were asleep."

"Sure. I gotta work on fixing this tent anyway. Just let it play." She touched some controls and set the Visor in the shade of a box of camp supplies. Ringer struggled with the tent while a deep, thickly accented voice came from the speaker.

"My name is Yahya ibn-Muhammad and I am a Child of Gaia, Ahroun for the pack of Hanan Amber-Eyes. I was born in a village called Jebal Ali in 1941. The village and my family were there since the year 256 AH, 878 AD to you, as the mullahs in the mosque had written. When I was seven, the Israelis razed my father's house. They told us only that we were no longer to live there. The village headman's house and the mosque they took and made part of their kibbutz. My family went to a refugee camp in the Gaza strip, on a patch of desert where nothing grew. The aid agencies went to the camp and gave out food, but some of it we could not eat because it was unclean. My grandmother died because some of the food was spoiled too. Some of us died within. Some gave in to violence. Some of us, a few, sought peace.

"You ask about religion. Yes, I am a Muslim. And I am a Child of Gaia. God gave his laws to us through the Prophet Muhammad, and all Muslims interpret them differently. He does not forbid that we revere the Earth, that we tend and care for Her. The Qur'an and the ahadith speak of many Muslims who pursued the way of Gaia, the way of peace. In my sept Hanan is a Christian, History-of-Clay a Jew. This does not keep us from fighting together for peace. For in my land peace, true peace, must be for all of us alike.

"My Change came when I was fifteen, and Salah, who was Garou, found me and took me to his pack. When Hanan came back from the United States where she had gone to school and began working for our freedom as a people, we moved to the West Bank

near where she lives. We have worked together for the Palestinian cause for thirty years.

"We organize marches, sometimes just standing because we can't get government permission to march. Two caerns have been destroyed because of Israeli 'settlements' in the West Bank. We protest every time a woman is raped, each time the Israelis shoot a kid for yelling at them or throwing rocks. Many Garou can't take it: they Rage, kill and kill. I don't blame them but it makes our lives very hard. Sometimes the Mossad provides Israeli soldiers and fanatics with silver. Our pack has it worst: we protect the Veil by keeping Garou bodies out of Israeli hands. It isn't easy: they are reluctant to release anyone's body lest the funeral become another protest. I have taken two Garou and eleven Kin bodies back from them myself. The Gifts and rites I know help, of course.

"In the rest of the Middle East there are more Children. Aryeh Cold-Heart was an Israeli soldier who first Changed on the battlefield in Lebanon and struck down twenty of his own army's men when he saw that the Israelis were butchering Lebanese civilians. He was working in the great oil fires in Kuwait last I heard, and his pack have sought in Iraq for the last Children there. A crow brought us news that they were all dead, killed by a mage who sided with Saddam Hussein; this was some kind of wizard whose power came from killing. It may be true.

"It isn't easy seeing your people suffer, being Garou and knowing that the Israeli soldier who killed your two sisters would die at your first blow. And knowing, as I do, that killing him would not bring them back. Would not make Palestine free. We are still working, but it is hard going.

"I have no more to say."

Africa

TO: spinach99@wyrdwolf.com
FROM: dirtyrocks@boering.com
CC:
SUBJECT: Ahadi

Mandy,

I am a farm extension office worker here in Groot Constantia at the Cape, and I am of the Children. Your friend Scott Jensen, whom I met at a development conference in Capetown in January, gave me your email and told me that you wanted to know how our work is going here. I've heard a lot on WyrdWolf's chatboard, but here's my take on it all.

The Ahadi holds: the pact of sort-of-peace between most of Africa's shapeshifters (I almost wrote "Entoban" instead of Africa; I'm obviously spending too much time with the wrong people.) The Dragon Breed, the cats, even the Garou who are hyenas (if they

are Garou) mostly abide by the alliance, most of the time. This hellish, war-torn home of mine has enough problems that we have managed to unmake one more.

Apartheid is dead (and so is the lion prince of darkness), and the Children here, black, white, colored and Asian, have rejoiced. We worked so long and so hard that the absence of the laws is almost worse than their presence; evil as it is, it was all we knew. Now comes the harder work: restoring a civil society, dignity, true peace. It is not easy, especially since the liberals of the West cared about apartheid, but not, apparently, about what would come when they helped erase it. We work to build solidarity among the races, include children of both factions in school and play activities, negotiate with leaders... maybe it's helping.

Africa is not Garou territory, and save for Egypt and maybe Morocco, it never has been. As Children of Gaia, this is hard for us to accept: that there is a part of Her body that belongs to other two-skins, and that the heartaches and terrors of this great land are theirs, not ours. I have lived all my life and will die here, working for justice. But perhaps even the Children cannot tell the Africans, mortal and immortal, what to do, cannot dictate destiny to another. I do not know.

Hope you are well by the sunny sea,

— Wilhelmina Brisebois ten Graz, Theurge, Two Oceans Sept, Constantia

India

May 31, 2001

Dear Mandy,

The baby is kicking. Keeps me awake some nights. She will be Garou, I'm sure of it. Casen tells me he can feel it too. You'll be an aunt in October. The monsoon season was incredible — towers of clouds and endless rain. Casen held me when the lightning began and gave me some of the Sight; I could watch the rain-spirits dancing. It amazes me that a man as strong as he is can be so tender sometimes. The sweet side of Rage, I guess.

You asked how the Church work was going. Well, about as you would expect in a nation like India that has suffered so much from Western stupidity and cruelty. We hold Gaian services once a week at sunrise and sunset. There are a few who come; we have explained that no one is excluded and that the Church does not ask them to abandon the local gods. We're not here to proselytize, just to show them another way. I think they like the singing and one boy has made up some new songs with me about keeping the earth and river clean.

Just got in an hour in the garden. Kumar, one of my students, made me a bamboo garden-seat so I can work without too much getting up and down while I'm pregnant. Greens are coming in, and the chili peppers have blooms on them again. We didn't get much oil out of the first crop of soybeans, but we'll try again. The soymilk is good for the weaned children, too. Anything's better than them buying powdered milk and vegetable oil from peddlers and paying a fortune. Classes start in about ten minutes so I'll keep this brief. I'm finished with the first aid class and I'm doing one on childhood illnesses. In the midday everyone is resting anyway, but this evening I want to sit down with a few of the women who want help building another solar oven. They see that it saves a lot of fuel and there is no more firewood within a day's walk of the village anyway. They used bamboo up till two years ago, when discharge from the gas plant made the grove start to die. Some of the families spend as much on firewood and charcoal as they do on rice.

The old men don't grumble as much about me and my husband being here since the dholes stopped coming. Casen started a night watch with the men: he says that at least one dhole pack that came into the valley had Talons in it. The watch routed the dholes after Casen had driven away two Talons — "Shivans," he calls them, worshipers of destruction. I understand that and I don't oppose them being wolves. But my students and friends here are not their prey.

I saw the dispatch from the action you did in Copperhill, Tennessee. Maybe there will be birds and trees again there someday now that you've gotten rid of the Wyrm taint. I'm sorry about Swordbearer; it sounds like once he got hit there was nothing you could do. You know, sister, you furries have a lot of tough powers, but it's stories like that that make me glad to be teaching, digging in my garden, helping build solar ovens. Glad to be working for Gaia, not fighting. Glad that I'm Kinfolk, not Garou.

Always your sister,

Celia Barret Keller

PS: Casen says he knows a Kin guy that you'd really like!

The Middle Kingdom

So what about China, Korea, Japan? Are the Children there?" Ringer sat on a campstool, staff over his knees while the camp lamp flickered. Joné dozed, rolled in a sleeping bag on a foam pad. A bunch of stoners went by giggling idiotically.

"No." Amanda sighed heavily. "Never have been, really. There are a few who go, stay, come back. Some go, study with the Stargazers, visit the Beast Courts. But no caerns, no septs."

So I am a twofold exile, Ringer thought sadly. Oh, well, Gaia is a good enough home.

"So, uh, how do the Garou there see us? Do they even know about the Children?"

"They... know things. The Children want to know how the other shapeshifters get along with the Garou. I mean, there are dragons in their caerns there. But the Stargazers left the Garou Nation, and they aren't coming back. And the shifters of the East don't want us there." Amanda looked older than she was, tired.

"Amanda, who is Edith Looking-Glass?" He'd heard the name in connection with the Middle Kingdom.

"Garou, Child of Gaia Galliard moviemaker from the Jewel Heart Sept in Michigan. Tough as nails. She, her group, they fight human rights abuses. Mostly just documenting everything they can. Scales cliffs, shoots video from the Umbra, interviews people in slave camps. I saw one of her movies, before it won that prize... scary, about the Burmese army's forced-labor gangs; they carry truckloads of food, ammo, explosives, days and days of climbing incredible mountains. A lot of them die but they're from tribes that the government wants dead anyway. No one ever saw it before her, no one but them. She got one boy out, brought him to the Hand of Gaia Caern, near here in upstate New York."

"Then Children do have a role in Asia."

"Well, yeah. Sure. It's not our land, but—"

"But it is." Ringer suddenly knew where he wanted to go, what he wanted to do. Speak truth to power, right?

Australia

From the personal diary of Jane Peck, Gill-Over-the-Ground, Galliard and Voice in Waiting for the Sept of Gaia's Bounty, Brisbane, Australia.

The past few years have been difficult ones, even with the apparent reappearance of the Rainbow Serpent to the Council and the return of the Gumagan. The Children have fought hard for peace in the Australian region, with three of my own pack risking their lives in East Timor to safeguard refugees. In many ways, the reappearance of the Gumagan is a greater reward, with our local Seekers overjoyed even though the two crocodile-men that have appeared have told us very little. In particular they will not answer questions about the survival of any Bunyip Kin. All this is connected somehow to a strange event that Porkchop the Bone Gnawer and Father Raymond, Child of Gaia, told their packs about in the early years of the colony. Their descendents say that this was an incident in which a band of Aboriginal laborers stole a boat and apparently killed the guards sent to subdue them; colonial records do mention the disappearance of some soldiers and of several chests of earth from England. The Gumagan made a claim that one of these natives, a shapeshifter, has somehow been reborn.

The Children in Australia have been shaken deeply by the disappearance and apparent death of the metis scientist Cernounos. This brilliant Garou had taken DNA samples from specimens of thylacine skin and hair, supplementing them with living blood cells provided to him by a mysterious Aboriginal man who claimed to know that the last Bunyip Kinfolk could be found near the Torres Strait. Using this DNA, he cloned several "Garou" infants and brought them to term using plastic pouches to simulate the thylacine's birth experience. The litter grew quickly and began Changing within two months of birth. The largest female, called Greatstripe, became the leader and the pack became brutal hunters. The native spirits remained silent on the new "Bunyip" and Cernounos told no one about his research. Gradually Darius Winchester, our Silver Fang King, became aware of the new creatures. And so did others: rumor has it that a cabal of life-warping humans with Gifts sought to use the metis' scholarship for their own ends.

When the new pack of "Bunyip" were about a year old, they disappeared. Their creator confided in his co-leader Inanna, then went to seek the lost "children" and never returned. Speculation among Inanna's close friends and packmates about the fate of the "Bunyip" has run rampant, but facts are hard to come by. It's clear that a violent struggle, including bloodshed, accompanied the departure of Cernounos and that even his Garou packmates did not know where exactly he was headed. Inanna fears the worst and her packmates believe her fears are justified. Her usual spirit voices are silent on this topic.

New Zealand is quiet, as my friend Soulefish told me. The new multitribal sept down on Stewart Island just opened the ancient caern there; the spirit, Tuatara, asked them a lot of questions about the Gumagan. The Get's bid for control there was foiled when they arrived and found a place as part of a greater Garou whole who would keep the land in common.

This land's, this Australia's beginning was so awful, and still we work, true as we can be to Father Raymond's vision of a new land where all would be equal, where justice and not the blind will of master would be law. We have a long, long way yet to go.

South America

HELLOKITTY Here is the latest dispatch from the war. I still don't know if this is something we should support.

TO: hellokitty39@wyrdwolf.net

FROM: distaff@kingdancer.sky

CC: stickman@wyrdwolf.net, wolflady@wyrdwolf.net, treasure181@megamule.ww

SUBJECT: On the Red Hill

Kit,

It's as bad now as it has ever been. Granted, you guys' Gaian Network managed to buy two thousand

more acres and save them, but Endron is still dumping here and Good House is making paper where a caern was fifteen years ago.

I led a protest recently with a local cane-cutter's collective, two hundred women and their families with signs and songs to the paper plant's gate. You can't imagine the stink of a paper mill till you've been there. The police came and attacked the demonstrators before they got to the factory door; two people died, a woman and a little boy who choked when we were gassed.

I told Garret and the Knights agreed in council to strike. I went with them; might be just a Theurge but I can pop claws with the best of them. We stepped sideways into the plant, trashed their files with the help of a cyber-spirit I know, and took ten staff prisoner while the Knights found and destroyed the most expensive machinery. It was worse than we expected — not just mundane evil, but the Wyrm's evil had settled into the place. We had to kill four guards who turned out to be fomori. Gifts to subdue them wouldn't work. I don't know how many fomori are going to have these powers from now on. It would really bollix things up if we had to kill every single one.

Good House closed the plant because of "labor problems" a week later, but the trees won't grow back for decades, even if we tear the building down. It's an eyesore now, windows smashed in and garbage everywhere, worse for Gaia almost than if it was working. This war has gone on for years and I worry that we aren't accomplishing anything.

Sorry to be so downbeat. TTYL,

Woman-in-the-Mist, Theurge of the Mother's Will pack.

Chapter Three: Green and Fallen Leaves

What would that world be, a world without war? It would be the real world. Peace was the true life, the life of working and learning and bringing up children to work and learn. War, which devoured work, learning, and children, was the denial of reality.

— Ursula K. Le Guin, *Four Roads to Forgiveness*

Although the most common concepts for Children of Gaia are usually teachers, diplomats and healers, it's well worth remembering that the Children are a tribe of Garou like any other. Children can be soldiers, singers, thieves, eco-terrorists, layabouts, anarchists, artists — the possibilities are near endless. Unicorn's creed doesn't mandate that all Children pursue the elusive goal of "peace" in the same fashion.

The only real defining factor is that almost all Children deeply believe in the importance of making the world a better place. They may have come to that conclusion on their own, or had it hammered into their heads from birth; they may choose the path of non-violence, or choose to bring death to those who endanger the ideal of a better world. And it should also be noted that Children are very, very rarely creatures of passive resistance — they're werewolves, and as such potentially the least passive creatures on the planet. The Children are passionate about their ideals, and demonstrate as much every day. When creating a Child of Gaia character, keep this passion in mind, because it's often the source of the tribe's strength.

Backgrounds

Since the Children of Gaia come from a diverse group, they have a wide variety of advantages at their disposal. Their lack of Background restrictions shouldn't be seen as a lack of definition, but as a chance to really explore the diversity of a tribe that accepts almost anyone, from any level of society and from any place of origin.

Allies

Most Children of Gaia do their best to cultivate as many allies as possible; the tribe would rather be loved than feared. These allies are typically within the human world, as the Children are well aware that a human ally can do more for the cause of peace than a werewolf cursed with Rage might. Allies of other tribes are also possible, although they tend to be based on personal relationships rather than tribal pacts of friendship; more than one tribe has a tendency to view the Children of Gaia collectively as a burden, while making exceptions for a Child or two who have proven themselves more than capable of carrying their weight.

The Children are comparatively more likely to develop allegiances within other supernatural groups (notably magi or Fera), although even this is treated with extreme care. More often than not, the trust in such a relationship isn't enough to merit the status of "Ally," and such relationships are taken as Contacts.

Ancestors

The ties with one's ancestor-spirits tend to mark a Child so blessed. Those who possess this Background are often less comfortable with modern tactics like protest marches, instead becoming more prone to older styles of diplomacy. A Child with high levels of Ancestors is often a touch more cynical, being well aware just how recent most Western cultural revelations are, but they are also much more steeped in the older traditions of their tribe.

Contacts

A Child of Gaia's connections can be from all walks of life, and usually are; the tribe's influence stretches far beyond college campuses. Political figures and community workers or officials are popular choices, particularly given that the Children are usually all too willing to help these people with their agendas (should they be related to the Children's own). A Child who was born to another tribe might have contacts among that tribe, if the parting was amicable. Also, as previously noted, a Child might have contacts among other supernatural groups, so long as such contacts don't jeopardize the overall struggle of the Garou.

Fetish

Obviously, the Children of Gaia favor fetishes of healing, purification and harmony to fetishes of war. The tribe's favored fetish weapon is the staff, which can be used to subdue or kill as need be (unlike a claw). Fetish staves are almost never made from silver, as that would make them more lethal against other Garou than the Children would like.

Kinfolk

The Children of Gaia have far more human than wolf Kin, to the slight detriment of the tribe. The tribe's ever-increasing homid majority is generally more comfortable with humans than wolves, given that humans are capable of understanding the ideologies of the tribe, while wolves are more interested in survival. The Children do their best to have large families, and to keep all their Kin as well-educated about the struggle as possible, a combination that has led to a few unfortunate security breaches here and there. And, unfortunately, there are just as many bad apples among the Children's Kinfolk as there are among the Kin of other tribes — as proved by the Skinner.

Mentor

A Child of Gaia's mentor is almost always of the same tribe; few Garou of other tribes are all that attached to the Children's ideology. Mentor and student are often surprisingly different in many of their outlooks, given the diversity of the tribe and its members' values; a former member of the Imminent Strike might coach a young pacifist, for instance. These seemingly mismatched pairings are often undertaken in order to teach the cub (and sometimes the mentor) the values of compromise.

Pure Breed

Children of Gaia with true Pure Breed are notably rare in the modern day. The tribe has bred with so many groups and adopted so many cubs of other tribes that its own bloodlines have been somewhat diminished. Those rare Children with Pure Breed have a faint dappling of white in Lupus form, and have features vaguely reminiscent of the Mediterranean and Middle East in Homid. Tribe members from the stock of other tribes might visually have something akin to Pure Breed — for instance, a Child of Black Fury stock might have a strong black coat and Greek features. However, Pure Breed keeps it supernatural potency only if it's the lineage of one's tribe; these Children can't convincingly pass for Pure Bred members of other tribes.

Resources

Few Children of Gaia are from "old money"; most members of the tribe are dead-set against the sort of practices that tend to make one rich. Most Children are of low Resources, neither dirt-poor nor comfortably well off. They often gain their money from odd jobs, or are even supported by Kin spouses or family. Rich Children are therefore exceedingly rare, although they do exist.

Rites

The Children are not as a whole as devout ritualists as other tribes tend to be. Rites of accord are very popular among the tribe, as are mystic rites, but only a few Children from any sept are likely to know punishment rites. Most Children favor rites that ask for the spirits' permission rather than forcing them; it's a rare Child that forces a non-Wyrmish spirit into a fetish against its will.

Totem

The Children have no particular biases against the sort of totems they follow, and are as likely to follow a totem of War as any other. Naturally, all-Children packs tend to prefer totems of Unicorn's brood, and the Children find personal pride in following totems like Bear. The only common pack totem that most Children of Gaia have difficulty with is Great Fenris — the violent wolf-god's creed of never refusing a worthy fight is at direct odds with the tribe's policies against unnecessary violence. Still, a rare few Children have taken Fenris as their patron across the ages, and greatly raised their tribe's esteem in the Get of Fenris' eyes in the process.

Gifts

The Children of Gaia have accumulated many Gifts over the centuries, and their traveling from one sept or caern to another has only increased the store. A few Gifts are even practiced exclusively by Kin of the Children, detailed in **Kinfolk: Unsung Heroes**.

• **Water-Conning (Level One)** — The Child may purify water by dipping her hand or bowing her forehead to the surface. An avatar of Unicorn teaches this Gift as a sign of his favor.

System: The Garou touches the surface and rolls Perception + Primal-Urge. Water that is poisoned by animal dung or parasites has a 5 difficulty. The difficulty is 7 for chemical waste and 9 for Wyrm-taint. Each success purifies enough water for one person for one day.

MET: Make a Static Mental Challenge (retest with *Primal-Urge*) against five traits for biological

waste, seven traits for chemical waste and nine traits for Wyrm-taint. Every success purifies a day's ration of water for one person.

• **Jam Weapon (Level One)** — The Garou may stop any Weaver-born weapons from working within the range of his voice. A dove-spirit teaches this Gift.

System: The Garou shouts a single, strange word and spends a Gnosis point. The player rolls Perception + Expression, difficulty of the Willpower of the nearest armed person. For each success, all manufactured weapons will not function for one combat round. This includes guns, crossbows, flame-throwers, and even tasers or cattle prods (anything with moving parts). It does not include natural weapons (retractable claws don't count as moving parts).

MET: Spend a Gnosis trait and make a Social Challenge against the nearest armed person within earshot. With success, all manufactured weapons of the target stop working for one turn. As your game area may not allow for shouting, use common sense (and Storyteller's discretion) regarding the area of effect.

• **Swallow Rage (Level One)** —This Gift allows the Child of Gaia to overcome her innate savagery, although at a dangerous cost. By use of this Gift, the Child may stop a frenzy and reduce her Rage by directing it inward. The inward battle is visible for several minutes and can take the form of a shuddering concentration or even a masochistic beating. An ancestor-spirit teaches this Gift.

System: When the Garou falls into frenzy, the player may make a reflexive Rage roll, difficulty 7; this Rage roll, unlike others, cannot in itself induce frenzy. Even one success on this roll immediately brings the werewolf out of frenzy. However, each success does one health level of lethal damage to the Garou, and reduces her temporary Rage by a similar amount. The player must decide at the moment of entering frenzy whether to use this Gift or not; once the Garou has fully succumbed to frenzy, she cannot focus enough to use this Gift.

MET: Whenever you fail a frenzy test, you may immediately make a Rage Challenge (no retest allowed, nor do you need to make a follow-up frenzy test). With success, you do not enter frenzy, but you lose one Rage trait and take one level of lethal damage for each success.

• **Domestic Seeming (Level Two)** — Unicorn does not want humans to fear her children, even the lupus. Many lupus Children of Gaia learn this Gift in the interest of walking comfortably among humans. By using this Gift, a werewolf in Lupus form convinces observers that they see a dog, not a wolf. Ordinary humans look at the wolf and think "husky," "malamute" or some other similar breed of dog. Even other supernatural beings (save spirits) can be fooled by the Gift, seeing what they expect to see rather than the truth. This Gift is taught by any spirit of peace.

System: The player spends a Willpower point and rolls Manipulation + Animal Ken; the usual Manipulation penalties for Lupus form do not apply for the purposes of this Gift. If the player fails the roll, any observer can tell they're looking at a wolf with a successful Perception + Animal Ken roll. If the player gains any successes, human observers cannot penetrate the disguise; supernatural creatures may make a Perception + Animal Ken (difficulty 7) opposed by the player's roll to penetrate the illusion. Spirits of the Middle Umbra are not affected by the Gift at all; they recognize the werewolf as one of Gaia's warriors as usual. The Gift's effects last for a scene, or until the werewolf changes form.

MET: Spend a Willpower trait and make a Social Challenge (retest with *Animal Ken*). With success, your lupus form merely looks like a large dog, not a wolf, and only supernatural observers may attempt to penetrate the disguise (by making a Mental Challenge resisted by your Social Challenge). If you lost the challenge, any observer may do so by making a Mental Challenge (retest with *Animal Ken*). You should wear a tag or some other marker to indicate your change.

• **Grandmother's Touch (Level Two** — This Gift heals as does Mother's Touch, but can heal the user of the Gift. This Gift cannot heal spirits or the undead. A unicorn-spirit teaches this Gift.

System: The player spends a Gnosis point and rolls Intelligence + Medicine (difficulty of the wounded individual's Rage, or 6 for non-Garou). Each success heals one health level, and the Child may heal Battle Scars as well with the expenditure of an additional Gnosis point, as long as the Battle Scar was received in the same scene.

MET: As *Mother's Touch*; spend one Gnosis to heal one health level of damage (a Mental Challenge is also required to heal non-Garou). This power does not work on the undead. Battle Scars may be healed with an additional Gnosis Trait, provided they are healed during the same scene in which they were made.

• **Mule's Bane (Level Two)** — This metis-specific Gift allows a metis to lash out at others by visiting his enemies with his own deformity. Mule-spirits teach this Gift.

System: The player spends one Gnosis point and rolls Dexterity + Expression to "throw" the metis' deformity; the difficulty is the opponent's Willpower. The enemy gains the metis' deformity for one turn per

success, subject to Storyteller approval. If the metis botches, his own deformity becomes worse in some fashion for the remainder of the scene.

MET: Spend one Gnosis trait and make a Physical Challenge (retest with *Expression*). With success, your opponent gains your metis deformity and any related Negative Traits for one turn.

• **Soothe the Savage Beast (Level Three)** — By being the catalyst for any sort of soothing music (singing, turning on a radio, playing a CD, etc.) the Garou makes it more difficult to Rage. When Garou must fight one another, the Children of Gaia sometimes use this to their advantage, as many are more experienced at holding back their Rage. A nightingale-spirit teaches this Gift.

System: The player rolls Gnosis, difficulty 7. Each success increases the difficulty of Rage rolls by 1 for all those in earshot (to a maximum difficulty of 10). The effects last for as long as the Child of Gaia is able to continue providing music.

MET: Make a Gnosis Challenge (if attempting this against a large group, mob rules apply); you must also provide audible, soothing music of some sort (no heavy metal, no rap) for the Gift to work. Everyone within earshot loses one Rage Trait. A target's Rage Traits may not fall below one.

• **Words of the Alpha (Level Three)** — The Children have often sought leadership in human societies as well as among Garou. This Gift allows a leader to seek the best course of action for a particular goal. Eagle teaches this Gift.

System: The Garou meditates on the chosen goal, spends a Gnosis point, and rolls Intelligence + Leadership (difficulty 8). For each success, she gains one fragment of insight, be it a word of advice or hint at secret knowledge, into the right way to lead this group toward her chosen end. Note that Eagle does not show the most popular way, or the easiest way. His flight is high, and he flies alone.

MET: Announce the goal for which you seek advice to a Narrator, then spend five minutes in meditation. At the end of five minutes, spend a Gnosis Trait and make a Mental Challenge (retest with *Leadership*). With success, a Narrator may provide you with some snippet of advice that can help you achieve your goal.

• **Lover's Touch (Level Three)** — The Garou can restore what another lacks: not only wounds healed, but also strength of will and even spiritual essence. Any spirit of love or avatar of Unicorn may teach this Gift.

System: The Garou touches the afflicted person kindly; the system is the same as for Mother's Touch. The two need not be lovers but the contact must convey affection and warmth; the two may embrace, one may caress the other or wrestle with him, or there may be further intimacy. The Garou spends a Gnosis point and rolls Intelligence + Medicine as usual; each success may restore one health level of damage, one point of Willpower, or one point of Essence (if the target is a spirit). The difficulty is the Rage or Willpower of the other person (whichever is higher). The player may choose to divide the successes among multiple pools; he need not choose to heal only wounds or Willpower. In all other respects, this Gift functions as Grandmother's Touch, save that it can be used on spirits (but, yet again, not undead).

MET: Spend one Gnosis to heal two health levels of damage, one Willpower Trait, or one Essence. The Mental Challenge to heal non-Garou is still required. This power does not work on the undead.

• **The Cleaving Hoof (Level Three)** — Unicorn's powerful hoofblows often killed the humans that hunted him. This gift allows the Garou to focus inner strength into a single blow, ending a fight before further harm can take place. A Unicorn-spirit teaches this Gift.

System: The player spends a Gnosis point before rolling to hit. If he successfully strikes his opponent, the dice gained from Strength in his damage pool count as automatic successes rather than dice. Dice in the damage pool gained from weapons, claw damage or extra successes on the attack roll must be rolled as usual. For example, a werewolf with Strength 5 uses this Gift before successfully clawing an opponent; his damage pool works out to be 9 dice (5 for Strength, +1 for the claw maneuver, +3 for three additional successes on the attack roll). The player rolls four damage dice, adding any successes (or subtracting in the case or rolling ones) to the five automatic successes on the damage roll. The defender may soak as usual.

MET: Spend a Gnosis Trait. You receive one free retest on your next damaging attack. This Gift lasts for one turn.

• **Unicorn's Grace (Level Four)** — The Garou blessed by Unicorn are calm even in the midst of chaos. This Gift, taught by an avatar of Unicorn, allows the Garou to keep a tight lid on her anger.

System: The player spends a Gnosis point; for the rest of the scene, her Garou cannot frenzy, and her ability to spend Rage is limited by her Empathy rather than Dexterity. Further, her Rage is considered three points lower for purposes of determining whether surrounding humans are affected by the Curse

(**Werewolf**, p. 191). This Gift does not work if the Garou is in Crinos form.

MET: Spend a Gnosis Trait; for the remainder of the scene, you cannot frenzy. Your ability to spend multiple Rage Traits in a turn is limited by your Social Traits rather than your Physical Traits. This Gift also softens the Curse when dealing with humans. This Gift will not work if you are in Crinos.

• **Uncaught Since the Primal Morn (Level Four)** — This Gift grants Unicorn's perfect speed to the Garou, allowing her to outrun virtually any pursuer. An avatar of Unicorn teaches this Gift.

System: The player spends a Gnosis point and makes an opposed Stamina + Athletics roll against the fastest of any pursuers; the Garou is unfailingly faster than her pursuers for one scene for each success.

MET: Spend one Gnosis Trait and make a Physical Challenge (retest with *Athletics*) against the fastest of your pursuers. If you win, your pursuers have no chance of catching you for one hour.

• **Serpent-Driving (Level Four)** — The touch of Unicorn's horn sets evil spirits and poisonous beasts to flight. This Gift enables the Child of Gaia to mimic Unicorn's power, driving foul creatures out of water, underbrush, and so on. It is a more powerful ability of Unicorn's horn, and Unicorn himself teaches this Gift.

System: The Garou touches his hand or forehead to the water, into the alleyway, or into whatever area he suspects of harboring enemies. He then rolls Gnosis, with the difficulty being 4 for ordinary animals such as snakes, 6 for lesser Wyrm creatures (such as fomori), 8 for Wyrm-servitors of strong power (such as Black Spiral Dancers) and 10 for powerful creatures of the Wyrm. For each success, one such creature is forced to abandon its hiding place or nest by the most direct route possible. If the Wyrm-creatures were using any supernatural means of concealment (such as Gifts or Disciplines), they may make a Willpower test, difficulty of the Garou's Gnosis, to maintain these powers. They must still physically leave the area, however. Note that this Gift may cause the creatures to attack and is thus best used with care. Serpent-Driving may be used only once per game session.

MET: You must clearly define the area you suspect of containing concealed creatures, then make a Static Gnosis Challenge against four traits for ordinary animals such as snakes, six traits for lesser Wyrm creatures, eight traits for strong Wyrm-servitors and 10 for powerful Wyrm-creatures. Success flushes out your chosen prey and they must leave the area you defined. Any creatures that were using Gifts, Disciplines or other powers of concealment may make a Willpower Challenge against the Garou's Gnosis; failure indicates that they must stop using those powers. This Gift may be used only once per session.

• **Trust of Gaia (Level Five)** — The Child of Gaia with this Gift can instantly earn the trust of any who hear her speak, even over electronic devices like telephones or loudspeakers. Affected listeners feel that the speaker is a good and trustworthy person, although it does not coerce them in any other way. Those affected will not willingly attack the Garou, although they can be mind-controlled to do so (and will hate doing so). Banes, Black Spiral Dancers and other creatures of powerful Wyrm-taint feel intense dislike instead of trust.

The trust evoked by this Gift doesn't supersede common sense; if the Child of Gaia drives a speeding car through a crowd of affected listeners, they'll still scatter for cover, although they'll feel certain she had a good reason to be in such a hurry. An avatar of Unicorn teaches this Gift, and demands that the recipient swear never to abuse its power.

System: The player spends a Gnosis point and rolls Manipulation + Empathy; the difficulty is 6 to affect humans, 8 to affect humans corrupted by the Wyrm or other shapeshifters, or 10 to affect supernaturals corrupted by the Wyrm (such as vampires). Creatures born directly of the Wyrm such as fomori or Banes, or ritually enslaved to the Wyrm, such as Black Spiral Dancers, are immune. All listeners must make successful Willpower rolls (difficulty of the Garou's Gnosis) to resist. For the duration of the scene, all affected listeners treat the Garou as if she were a trusted friend. After the Gift's effects end, those affected by the Gift do not remember being supernaturally swayed.

MET: Spend a Gnosis Trait and make a Static Social Challenge (retest with *Empathy*, mob rules apply); all listeners within earshot resist with Willpower. The difficulty is six Traits to affect humans, eight traits to affect Wyrm-tainted humans or other supernaturals, and 10 to affect supernatural creatures indirectly affected by the Wyrm (such as vampires). Any affected targets that fail their Willpower tests treat the Garou as a trusted friend for the duration of the scene, and do not remember being induced into this trust. Black Spiral Dancers, fomori, Banes and other creatures directly born of or enslaved to the Wyrm are immune (Storyteller's discretion regarding the effects on Sabbat vampires, Thallain, fae of House Balor or the Shadow Court, Nephandi or Spectres).

• • •

Night had fallen some time ago and the circle of Garou was well lit by the Umbral fire, but it became

noticeable that more fires were erupting in the material world. Ringer peeped through the barrier. He saw chaos: men tore down sections of the peace wall and fed them to giant bonfires, which were spreading further and further. The ground was littered with candles in little cups, remnants of a candle lighting for peace that had obviously produced just the opposite. Ringer choked on heavy smoke as he pulled his awareness back to the Shadow and shouted, "You guys better step sideways right now!" Garou began shifting and Ringer stepped through with his whole pack. More shouting and screaming could be heard over the Flaming Green Jumping Beans' music. In the mosh pit, he saw fights, with two guys at least lying still and bloody as the band screamed "Yeah! Kick some ass, doods! Get it on! Rowdy! Rowdy! Rowdy! Whooee!"

"Something is going horribly wrong here," Rich said as he noticed the chaos beginning to erupt around the concert. Before anyone could act, Garret Faithful pointed into the crowd and cried, "They're raping that girl! Come!"

As his pack charged into the concert-goers, other Garou began rushing into the reveling that had become rioting, each one intent on stopping similar atrocities. Security men removed the idiotic band from the stage and an organizer started trying to calm people down, which wasn't working. Amanda spotted a gauntlet of men forcing frightened, screaming women through their ranks. She called out to her untested pack, "Over there! Stay Homid if you can!" How had the peaceful air of the concert changed? Why had everyone become so violent?

Dismantling the wilding line was messy; the pack hadn't worked together like this before. Rich was for his part angrily grabbing the bottles of water and belts from the men's hands like an angry father taking toys from disobedient children. Men who resisted he batted to the ground, where they lay very still. The yellow-shirted "peace patrol" were nowhere to be seen. Quite a few of the pack took a few bumps and bruises, some of which could have been averted if Joné had been helping them instead of tending to the girls who were already free. Ringer had severely bloodied several with his staff while Hack was getting a little too into dealing out justice.

Our first pack action, thought Amanda. *We need work*. Just as the offenders were dispersing, though, a horrible noise caught her attention. Rich could feel his hair begin to stand on end. Quickly, he stepped sideways to get a better look at his surroundings and the possible cause of the odd feeling. The webs that had shrouded the place could be seen bulging here and there, dark patches growing where the webbing was strained the most. He stepped back sideways again just in time to miss them bursting forth with vile blackness. The web-hill that marked the buildings was heaving, erupting.

"I think this place of power has been claimed by the wrong side," Rich had just begun to say when dark forms burst from the bonfires of burning port-a-potties and water booths. They were easily identified as Black Spirals and twisted fomori. Two trailers went up, with figures running from them amidst the stink of gasoline.

"Trouble at the main stage — follow me!" The pack followed as they could, with other Ahroun mobilizing their packs as well. "Garret — what are we going to do?" The taller man came alongside.

"Keep peace, keep the human shape. Find the troublemakers and sit on 'em. Okay?" The Galliard howled his orders and two dozen Garou charged into a writhing mess of humans. The onetime mosh pit was now simply a battlefield.

"So much for Homid only!" Hack changed to Hispo and leapt upon the nearest Dancer. He kept it pinned while Ringer beat its head in with his staff.

Joné was in Glabro, trying to evacuate noncombatants, who were running and screaming in confusion. "Amanda! There's too many of them!" Women had climbed, panicked, onto the speaker towers, which were teetering back and forth near collapse.

Perhaps eight or ten thousand humans had come to this festival; maybe five thousand were in the huge brawl while the Jumping Beans' recorded music blared from speakers. The noise was irritating as hell to Garou ears. Ringer picked out two Kin he knew who were holding off a bunch of guys by a speaker tower. No staff, no "weapons"; human police would probably come. He charged with Hack, now in human form and wearing a T-shirt and gym shorts, into the mass, stepping accidentally on two guys who were on the ground bleeding. One had a bite wound (a bite wound, he wondered?) bleeding heavily. Of the two Kin, one was down, hit in the head and back. Ringer jumped one assailant, then realized something was more wrong than he'd imagined. Wyrmstink filled his nostrils in the man's body odor.

He'd heard of fomori, humans possessed by Wyrm-devils, a legion of freaks cursed with monster-powers. This thing threw him, then jumped on him as Hack hit two of the guys hard, low. Ringer wrestled, against inhuman strength, trying for a hold. Usually like holding on to a guy better than this, he reflected. A moment's view past the thing showed him a field of fighting, a Garou he didn't know clubbing two humans to the ground, another fomor looting a jeweler's stand.

The man smacked him against the tower's base, Ringer's head whirling. He heard the Kinswoman's scream. Then a deep *tock* as she hit the man who was pinning him with a chunk of concrete. Ringer swept a leg up, taking advantage of the moment, and the two struggled side by side while Hack had one fomor in a restraint hold. The Kin girl clubbed him hard twice and he went limp, enough damage to kill a human, blood seeping from scalp wounds. Ringer's own adversary twisted, tried to get an arm free to strike. Ringer hit him in the throat, again in the gut, slammed him against the tower's corner. The man struggled on, got an elbow into Ringer's temple. Dazed, the Garou warrior put the pain aside with a thought, then cracked a hand across the fomor's neck, stunning him. The speaker tower groaned, then collapsed with a crash. He rolled to his feet, kicked the foe hard in the gut to make sure. The Kinswoman was smiling, holding a knife.

"Shall I? Or are we being peaceful?"

"Leave it to the war leaders. No need to do any more killing than we have to." What anyone could do with fomori... he didn't know. Garret was tough but hated slaughter.

The field was clearing, with human cops beginning to show up, but the Garou had found and killed or taken most of the fomori and Black Spirals; the fight was over. The band was gone of course, hustled to safety by corporate security that had done nothing to keep the peace.

"Mandy, there are Banes here too; we gotta get out."

Amanda looked around and saw it was true; the Wyrm had possessed the rioters and Black Spirals were everywhere. She could even hear Garret calling a retreat. Pulling a group of rioters off Ringer, who was trying not to kill them, she yelled, "Everyone out! Save as many innocents as you can!"

As they fled the burning, confused scene, Amanda stopped to take a final look — and then it hit her. A Pit. This whole thing could have ended with the creation of a Pit. The Dancers and fomori were already there in force, ready to begin the rites; when the concert-goers flew out of control, that must have been like a siren song to the Banes in the area — or any that came with the Fallen. They almost did it. They could have done it, encouraging even more suffering and cruelty as they went, generating enough anguish to taint the caern into something horrible.

Winter-Stars howled that the Garou should clear the field. Ringer and Hack went, taking the Kinfolk with them. "Name's Kevin. This is Jason," he said; Hack had insisted on using a human name to "fit in."

"Maggie Quarg. My brother Michael." They were brown-haired kids with compact bodies, both pretty good-looking. She and Hack half carried the guy, slashed and bleeding, to Rich, who stopped the blood with a spirit-whisper as his hands ran over Michael's side. Michael sagged with relief as the pain left him. "Honored Garou, our thanks. We cannot repay you."

"The honor is mine," Rich replied just as formally, "daughter and mother of The People." Rich was standing beside Mandy and joined in looking back. "So much for peace, love and happiness."

"Rich, what the hell happened?" Kevin asked after Rich had performed some more minor rites. "Those—." The cops had arrested some fomori, ambulances taking others. "How did this happen?" Mandy asked, dazed at the carnage.

"I don't know. But I have an idea. I have to check with Garret; he was on the field with us and he might be better at tracking them back. We may have to do some housecleaning here."

"Have we failed, Rich? The Children of Gaia, I mean."

Rich shook his head. "Like you said, Mandy. Peace is always a struggle. We're just struggling right now."

They then turned and left the chaos and madness to another day.

Rites

Rite of the Teachers

Minor Rite

This rite involves using the teacher plants of Gaia (hallucinogenic plants) which have had their spirits Awakened (using the Rite of Spirit Awakening). The ritemaster must prepare the plants carefully and then use them in the appropriate manner (such as smoking jimson weed or eating sacred mushrooms). Note that the use of the plants is forbidden in some cases by human law.

System: For each level of bashing damage that the Garou takes from exposure to the drugs in question, the Gauntlet is effectively lowered by one for the purposes of using Gifts or rites or stepping sideways. The reduced difficulty lasts for five minutes after the completion of this rite.

MET: The Garou receives a free retest on his next Gift, rite or effort to step sideways after this rite.

The Bowels of the Mother

Minor Rite

This simple rite enables other rites to be performed in less than ideal circumstances. The Ragabash Soldier-of-Paradise developed it while serving in the US military. Rites requiring Gaia's physical presence (that is, that natural earth, air, water or fire be present) are difficult to perform while the ritemaster is in a setting where they do not exist, such as a ship at sea. The clever No-Moon

reasoned that "there's wind in your lungs, water in your veins, fire in your heart and soil in your bowels."

System: When a ritemaster performs this rite, she may substitute the body of any living creature for the required earth, wind, etc. for a rite that immediately follows. For example, when a rite requires the ritemaster to touch earth, she may hold another's hand instead; a fetish may be held over the heart instead of over a fire. No roll is necessary, although the difficulty of the rite for which the substitution is made is increased by one. It has sadly been shown that even the rite of Gaia's Vengeful Teeth can be cast this way. Soldier-of-Paradise was not successful in his attempts to perform the Rite of Spirit Awakening on his intestinal bacteria, but perseveres nevertheless.

MET: After casting this rite, the ritemaster may use the body of a living creature for whatever rite follows immediately after. Spirits of any kind and the undead may not be used for this rite. The target need not be willing, and additional challenges may be required to prepare the target.

Rites of Accord

Rite of the Pregnant Mule

Level One

This rite is known only to metis. No one else would ever want to learn it. It honors Father Mule, patron of the middle breed. It enables metis to adopt other metis as their children. Since most metis are abandoned or worse by their biological parents, older metis see these Crinos pups as a personal responsibility. And who better to raise a troublesome and often differently abled metis pup?

System: The adoptive parent asks the consent of the child's biological parents, if they can be found; if not, she asks the sept elders. (They may refuse.) She then takes the cub to the sept's caern and calls Garou, Kin and spirits (especially Mule, whose coming is taken as a blessing on the cub) as witnesses. The cub is put on the earth and allowed to crawl between the adoptive parent's legs as if being born again. The adoptive parents are then counted as the true parents of the child in every way (including Renown). Metis of rank 5 or greater are very rarely allowed to adopt an orphaned homid or lupus cub; the rite is the same.

MET: A metis who performs this rite to adopt a child is hereafter considered that child's parent, responsible for teaching her the ways of the Garou and may receive Renown for "bearing" the child.

Rite of Comfort

Level Two

This rite is a healing ritual for Harano. It does not cure the condition, although the rite of Asklepios (see below) can indicate possible cures. The ritemaster can,

however, prevent the afflicted one from passing any deeper into Harano.

The ritemaster chants, burns mystic incense and engages the sufferer in breathing exercises. The dispirited one may leave before the rite begins, but not after it has started. This ritemaster may perform this rite more than once for each werewolf suffering from Harano.

System: The ritemaster chants, leads the sick one in breathing rituals, and makes a Charisma + Rituals roll. The recipient takes the number of successes as extra Willpower, which she may spend to resist Harano. She may not harm herself (such as through self-mutilation or suicide) until all the bonus points of Willpower are gone.

MET: The ritemaster makes a Social Challenge. Success grants two Willpower Traits to the suffering Garou for use in resisting Harano (either to spend or to add to her Trait total for the purposes of comparison on ties). The target may not harm herself until the Willpower Traits are gone. No more than four Traits may be gained with this ritual.

Rite of the Clouds and Rain

Level Two

This rite is kept a careful secret by Children of Gaia, and all who so much as know of it must swear never to mention it among non-initiates — if revealed, anyone involved would likely be ostracized by the rest of the Garou Nation. It allows the partial control of Rage at the price of violating a basic Garou law: the first precept of the Litany.

The rite involves channeling the force of Rage by having sex in Crinos form. To avoid injury or death to the partners, both must be Garou. Because the fear of producing a metis is so great, metis are often asked to perform the rite, as they are sterile. Some Garou actually enjoy multiple partners while performing this rite, although having more than one sexual partner during the rite can be somewhat confusing. Some say that the more Garou are involved, the more powerful the rite becomes. The truth of this is unknown.

System: The sexual partners invoke the spirits of peace and of desire, spending a point of Gnosis. They must demonstrate genuine affection for each other, or the rite will not work. If it works, the Garou can control the tendency to frenzy for the rest of the story. The Storyteller must determine the chance of pregnancy, if it is possible at all. Everyone involved in the rite loses a temporary point of Honor; the spirits who empower the rite, permissive though they may be, are still witnesses to the participants' transgression.

MET: Owing to the nature of the rite, this is best done through Storytelling. The partners each spend a Gnosis Trait. With success, the partners receive a free retest if they fail a frenzy test. Each participant also loses a temporary Honor. This rite lasts for one session.

Rite of Anger's Purge

Level Three

Rage makes a shapeshifter what they are. But it is a curse as well as a blessing. Some Garou can contain their Rage sufficiently to live with a Kinfolk family or enjoy a quiet dinner at a restaurant. But some are so out of balance that they can barely function without exploding. Others require punishment. For whatever reason, a Garou occasionally needs to have his potential for Rage lowered. In this rite, the subject changes into Crinos and is encircled by the participants who all wield whips, clubs, and other instruments of punishment (the "gauntlet"). They then proceed to beat the subject into submission, until he lies unconscious on the ground. A Garou can have the Beast beaten out of him in this way if such a punishment is required.

System: Each participant in the rite must expend at least one point of Rage. The subject loses one point of permanent Rage for each point spent in this way. If he frenzies shortly thereafter, the Storyteller may decide that the loss of Rage is not permanent, although few Garou have enough Rage to endure this rite and still be capable of frenzy in any but the most extenuating circumstances.

MET: Each participant in the gauntlet spends a temporary Rage Trait, and the target loses a permanent Rage Trait (his total may never drop below one Trait). At the Storyteller's discretion, the target's loss may not be permanent if he frenzies later in the session. The effects are otherwise permanent, although the player may purchase Rage with experience.

Mystic Rites

Last Blessing

Level One

The mere existence of metis threatens the Veil, as they are born and die in Crinos form. This blessing is given to a metis by the ritemaster after going to war and before the metis' face is cold in death. It simply ensures that the metis' corpse will be in that form which she most preferred (apart from her breed form, of course): human or wolf, arousing no suspicion. Many metis have received this rite with joy, seeing it as a sign of Gaia's forgiveness.

System: The ritemaster lays hands on the metis and chants the Song of the True Form; then spends one

permanent Gnosis. The metis' body changes to Homid or Lupus form, and the change is permanent.

MET: This rite must performed at the conclusion of battle, before the metis in question is cold. The ritemaster chants the song and spends a permanent Gnosis. The metis' body changes to Homid or Lupus form permanently. This may not be done while the metis still lives.

Rite of Asklepias

Level Three

The ancient Greek healer Asklepios was the greatest physician of the ancient world, and the Children and their Kin aided his cult for a thousand years. This rite allows the ritemaster and his patient(s) to see the correct cure for diseases and wounds untreatable normally. Only a few Children of Gaia still know it.

System: The ritemaster prays over the patient, who then sleeps all night in an underground shrine, either a small room (hence, "incubation") or a burrow for lupus. The ritemaster then rolls Wits + Rituals, difficulty 7, or 8 for illnesses of unknown origin. In the night, a spirit such as Asklepios, Clara Maas or Carlos Finley (the discoverer of yellow fever vaccine) will appear to the patient and explain how to cure the disease. The patient will then awaken and perform the steps described. For each success of the ritemaster, one level of damage will be cured. The patient and the ritemaster will then perform a sacrifice to Gaia. This can be a gift of goods or treasures, but can also be a service or quest to aid the ritemaster.

MET: The ritemaster makes a Static Mental Challenge against 7 Traits. Success means a spirit related to healing comes to the patient and explains how to cure the disease. If the steps are followed, the patient is cured. Both patient and ritemaster are required to make a sacrifice to Gaia. At Storyteller discretion, this may not work against diseases such as cancer, AIDS or hemorrhagic fevers like Ebola.

Rite of Blood Kin

Level Three

The Children of Gaia have perhaps more and better-organized Kin than any other tribe, but even they are sometimes outside the Kinfolk network. This rite seeks Kin that the ritemaster does not know. The Garou will entrance himself and then whisper the names of all the ancestors whom he knows. (Some homids write the names, use a computer, etc.) At the end of the rite the names of previously unknown Kin will be added to the list. This rite does not tell the Garou anything at all about the Kin; more than one Child has run afoul of Skin-Dancers this way....

System: The Garou rolls Wits + Empathy, difficulty 5. For each success, one new Kinfolk is added to the list.

MET: Make a Mental Challenge (retest with Empathy). With success, a new Kinfolk's name is added.

Sin-Eating

Level Three

This rite allows the ritemaster to end the suffering of others by taking their Wyrm-taint onto himself. It can cleanse both the living and the dead. The rite is reflected in a few rural communities in the Appalachians and elsewhere, where humans attempt to take the sins of others onto themselves to release a dead soul from Hell.

System: The Garou lays out a meal on the body of the person (usually on their chest or in their hands) and eats it. As he does so, he makes a Wits + Rituals roll, with the difficulty being the sinner's Willpower. Success transfers the subject's Wyrm-taint into him; the Storyteller may require extra successes to transfer larger amounts of Wyrm-taint. This rite is said to be able to cleanse even Black Spirals (if huge numbers of successes could be achieved), but no such attempt has succeeded in living memory; Banes and fomori cannot be cleansed in this method, as they *are*, at least in part, Wyrm-taint itself.

MET: The Garou makes a Static Mental Challenge against the target's Willpower. With success, he takes the target's Wyrm-taint into himself (which may be cleansed normally).

Sing the Many Shapes

Level Three

The Garou are warriors, even the Children of Gaia. But the Garou have warred not only on the enemies of Gaia but on the Fera, and even on their own kin among the Bunyip. This rite mourns the lost and brings understanding of the reasons and results connected to the long-ago battles. The Speakers for the Dead often perform it in Australia in Bunyip bora rings or in the Camazotz caves of Mexico.

System: The ritemaster seeks a place associated with one of the long-lost Changers and enters into meditation on the vanished race. She must plead with the dead to hear her apologies or elegies for them (this should be roleplayed). The greater her knowledge of the lost ones, the greater her chance of success. For the following year, the dead will not haunt any that take part in this rite. At the Storyteller's discretion, the dead may communicate with the ritemaster; one or two who have partaken in this rite claim to have gained new knowledge or insights thereby.

MET: No special system required.

Rite of Talisman Adaptation

Level Three

This is similar to the Rite of Talisman Dedication but is more powerful. Talismans under this rite actually shapeshift into forms which are usable by the Garou, instead of "disappearing." Each counts for triple the Gnosis of a dedicated item: a Garou with a 7 Gnosis can have only two items adapted to her. For example, a Garou's clothes would adapt to the new body shape: a Garou might have a vest for tools in her Homid form, which would change into a Crinos-sized vest, and then shapeshift to Lupus, when it would become fitted to the wolf-body. A backpack would become a dog-pack, and so on. Note that frivolous items, such as high heels, stereos or coffee mugs, will not work and will cause loss of 3 permanent Gnosis if adapted.

System: The ritemaster recites the rite and places the item on the Garou's body. If extra items are attached, they will be torn or crushed when the Garou shapeshifts.

MET: Only one item at a time may be adapted during the rite. The Storyteller has final say on what items may be adapted.

Rite of Resolution

Level Four

This rite is also called the Rite of the Harena (or the Rite of the Sands). It prevents Garou who combat one another ritually from frenzying during the combat, whether it is wrestling, klaivaskar, Iskakku or kailindo. Other tribes often ask the Children to perform this rite lest their warriors slay one another over a minor dispute.

System: The combatants approach one another, shake hands or sniff one another, and howl out their respect for one another. The ritemaster stands as referee and rolls Charisma + Rituals against the highest Rage score of any combatant. For each success, one failed Rage roll for Frenzy may be ignored.

MET: The ritemaster makes a Static Social Challenge against the highest Rage Traits of the participants. With success, each participant may ignore one failed frenzy test.

Rite of the Sacred Peace

Level Five

Only the most brazen would violate a sacred peace. The entire sept, including Kin and representatives of the community, must gather at the caern and each participant must declare himself dedicated to the peace of the land. The strength of the peace equals the number of Garou plus half the number of Kin who join in the rite. Anyone deciding to make war on such a community must make a Willpower roll, difficulty 8, with as many successes as the strength of the peace. If ever this peace is broken, the leader of the community may utter a destructive curse upon the violator, using as many dice to curse as the strength of the peace. Treat this as the Flaw: *Dark Fate* with a strength equal to the strength of the broken peace.

Alternation of Generations

Level Five

The ancient lupus among the Children of Gaia beheld the "eternal heat" of humankind and realized that this ability could vastly increase their breeding capability as well as enhancing the pleasures of mating. In the present, as the blood thins more and more, homid women have employed it to increase the measure of wolf blood in the tribe. It allows a homid to bear lupus offspring and vice versa.

System: At the conclusion of the rite, the Garou spends a permanent Gnosis point, shapeshifts to match the form of the beloved one and approaches their intended. A homid mating in Lupus form must wait until the mating season, of course, but in all cases conception is guaranteed. The mother's breed form temporarily changes to that of her partner; the change lasts from conception to delivery, in order to prevent miscarriages.

Metis, of course, cannot use this rite — and none would teach it to them.

MET: The Garou spends a permanent Gnosis Trait. Whatever form is chosen, conception is guaranteed. The mother's breed form changes to match her partner's during the pregnancy.

End Time Rite

Level Five

This ritual gives insight into the nature of the Apocalypse. As such, enacting it is frightening, and many septs either forbid ritemasters to perform it or forbid them to speak publicly on what the rite reveals. Ritemasters who are able to speak on the rite say many different things about their visions.

The ritemaster must lead a group of Garou (and often Kin) in three days of chanting, dancing and meditating. If they manage to last through the lengthy and tiring rite, the ritemaster and others will see visions of the Apocalypse and of their own actions which are related to it. They will also see glimpses of how the actions of the Garou Nation have affected the Apocalypse. Some ritemasters have emerged hopeful, saying that the Children's peacemaking can change the world into a new and better form. Others predict extinction in a great battle, and still others

some bizarre Weaver "singularity" involving giant computers. Other tribes are always invited to participate in this rite, and Stargazers always seemed eager to do so, speaking of a new and transformed reality beyond the Apocalypse.

System: This rite requires the invocation of spirits of prophecy and time, which are by nature a cryptic lot. The ritemaster then leads three days of dancing and chanting and rolls Wits + Rituals, difficulty 7. The Storyteller may use the enactment of this rite as a story device; how "true" the visions are will be up to her.

MET: This rite is best used as a Storyteller device. After invoking the necessary spirits and the three days of chant and dance, the ritemaster makes a Mental Challenge.

Rite of the Parted Veil

Level Five

This rite is the Children of Gaia's ultimate gift to Gaia-cherishing humans. When it is performed, the Veil is not pierced (as in the deadly Rite of Rending the Veil) but parts seamlessly to admit one or more humans (or wolves!). The person on whom the rite is performed thus becomes Kinfolk. Two Children unrelated to the human must witness that he loves Gaia and would aid the Children's cause. Most often this rite is done for mates of Garou or Kin. Some of the Patient Deed say that they hope to extend the rite to whole nations.

The rite consists of the Garou dancing round the subject, while the ritemaster chants from the Songs of Welcome. As the rite progresses, the Garou slowly shapeshift, until finally they assume the Crinos form without frightening the human.

System: The ritemaster makes an extended Wits + Rituals roll, difficulty of the human's Willpower. He must accumulate successes equal to the human's age before the rite succeeds; children are easier to "adopt" than adults.

MET: The ritemaster spends two permanent Gnosis Traits and makes a Static Mental Challenge against the human's Willpower. Success brings the target human into the Kinfolk fold, and the human is considered Kin in regard to rules and Storytelling.

Merits and Flaws

Distant Sire (1 point Merit)

The Children of Gaia adopt so many pups that some Children maintain family ties with Garou parents in other tribes. This Merit simply means that you

know of a parent who is Garou (not Kin) in another tribe. (Male Children may claim sire-right among the Black Furies). The tribe needs to be specified and the Storyteller needs to give permission for you to choose the tribe that you specify. In some cases he may refuse. The Storyteller will create your parent, but will not reveal everything about them to you. In general, this Merit functions as a dot of Allies within another tribe, although it will also tend to spawn its own subplots.

Supporter (2 point Merit)

You inspire all around you to greater efforts. (You must roleplay this, of course). Whether by speaking, writing or leading by example, you give anyone who works with you reason to go on and hope of success. You have a -2 difficulty to Social rolls and you give any group effort +1 to its total dice pool.

Naïve (1 point Flaw)

You are hopelessly naïve about the nature of reality and see all through "rose-colored glasses." You may have been brought up in wealth and privilege, or be a survivor of abuse and trauma that you have repressed. You are unwilling to suspect evil or foul play, which can be a serious problem. The difficulty for any rolls to detect another person's ill intent, from the Sense Wyrm Gift to Empathy rolls, is raised by 2.

Vegan (1 point Flaw)

You cannot eat any food that comes from an animal's body. You also must avoid using animal products such as leather, fur or wool. If flesh so much as enters your mouth, the Storyteller may force you to make a Willpower roll to avoid gagging. This makes you unwelcome at most social events (especially among lupus) and you cannot hunt (except for spirits).

MET: Make a Willpower Challenge not to lose your lunch when you eat meat.

Charach (1 point Flaw)

You are known to have a Garou lover. You may be performing the Rite of the Clouds and Rain (see above), or simply be involved romantically. The Storyteller will create this character for you, but you should be aware that any charach is regarded by Garou (even some Children of Gaia) as a perverted criminal who deserves death. Other Garou may be very angry with you for breaking the Litany, and may insist on punishing you. You automatically begin the game with one less point of Renown, and must lose that point of Renown from Honor if at all possible.

Docile (1-3 point Flaw)

For better or for worse, you are docile in nature. Your distance from "the wolf" is noticeable to others. They may use the words "domesticated" or "dog." Some Children of Gaia lupus who have this Gift are actually somewhat doglike in appearance. For every point of Docile you take, your maximum Rage is lowered by 2, and can never be bought above that level.

MET: You gain the Negative Physical Trait Docile (which can be bid against you), and your maximum Rage is lowered by two Traits for each level of the Flaw you take.

Burned Out (3 point Flaw)

If anyone starts with the peace and love crap again, you just might lose it. Your lengthy struggle for good has taken its toll. You are depressed, cynical and prone to Harano; the difficulty of all Willpower rolls is raised by 1.

MET: You suffer a two-Trait penalty when you must rouse yourself to care or in challenges regarding Harano.

Ahimsa (4 point Flaw)

You have taken a vow not to kill any animal large enough to see (this does not include germs, plants, tiny insects, etc). This includes the *Vegan* Flaw (which you may not take along with this one) as well as deliberately inflicting lethal damage. You may fight (you will need to) but you must strive only to defeat your foes, not slay them. Many Children take this vow. If you kill accidentally, you will not lose the freebie points generated from this Flaw, but if you deliberately take another being's life the Storyteller will remove 3 points from your character anywhere that she sees fit.

MET: Accidental killing will not lose the extra points, but deliberate slaying or murder means the loss of three Traits from your character sheet (Storyteller's choice).

New Totems

Totem of Respect

Father Mule

Background Cost: 5

Mule, sterile son of Horse, is a totem who particularly favors metis. He values hard work, stubbornness, and strength. Lupus consider him a Weaver-thing, as they commonly believe (incorrectly) that hybrids do not occur in the wild. Homids consider him strange and perverse. He will not accept any fertile being as his child. Garou who follow either Horse or Bull will be well disposed toward children of Mule.

Traits: Mule grants his packs an extra dot of Strength and Stamina, which may be assigned as usual. Each pack member gains a point of Honor Renown; metis that follow Mule are presumed to bear their situation with grace.

Ban: Mule requires that his children obey all lawful orders. They must stubbornly refuse all unlawful orders.

MET: Mule's children gain the Traits *Stalwart* and *Robust*, and an Honor Trait.

Totems of War

Black Unicorn

Background Cost: 5

Black Unicorn is called by some "Unicorn's Shadow"; his coat is as dark as Unicorn's is white, though his eyes shine with the same reverent love for Gaia. He is a noble spirit of war, created by Unicorn to help defend her children in times of need and to teach the Children how to fight with nobility and chivalry.

Traits: Each member of Black Unicorn's pack gains a dot of Brawl and a point of Glory. In addition, any one pack member at a time may gain three extra soak dice; Black Unicorn prefers that these dice go to the pack member currently defending an innocent, if any. His pack may call on 5 extra Willpower points per story.

Ban: Black Unicorn demands that his children defend those who are unable to defend themselves, a duty that is often more demanding than it would seem.

MET: Black Unicorn's children gain a level of Brawl and a Glory Trait. Any one pack member may gain three extra Healthy levels (preferably if defending an innocent). Once per story, each pack member may add five Willpower Traits to their pool for the purposes of comparing on ties.

Eagle

Background Cost: 9

Eagle is a fierce fighter who aids Garou in honorable struggles and in building and upholding just societies. He loves those who cry for justice and hates cowardice and disunity.

Traits: Eagle grants three extra dice for any endeavor that the pack shares. In a pack of his which fights together, no member can suffer fox frenzy. Silver Fangs are prone to respect children of Eagle.

Ban: Eagle demands that his Children oppose injustice and work to build and maintain a just society. Simply killing evil people is not enough; Eagle's children must involve themselves in local government or politics to some extent, working positively toward a better society.

MET: Eagle's children are each granted a free retest when engaged on a pack endeavor. When a pack of his children fight together, they are immune to fox frenzy.

Totem of Wisdom

Sea Otter

Background Cost: 4

Sea Otter loves humans who swim and play in the water and who conserve the resources of the sea and land. He despises pollution and the overconsumption of the sea's wealth, especially shellfish. He has little power outside the natural range of the sea otter, but he gives what he can to those that will help the sea.

Gift: Sea Otter allows all of his children to float in the ocean or any water indefinitely; they will never tire or drown. Each child of Sea Otter also swims at twice normal speed and gains a point of Wisdom Renown. It's rumored that Rokea are well disposed toward children of Sea Otter, although little enough proof exists.

Ban: Sea Otter demands that the ocean and its resources remain inviolate, including cleaning streams for use as salmon runs, preserving shellfish beds, and creating and protecting nesting grounds for seabirds. His followers are less often eco-warriors than tireless workers for the maintenance of as much of the sea as can be saved.

MET: Sea Otter's children swim at twice normal speed, and can automatically keep their heads above water if they so desire. They also gain a Wisdom Trait.

• • •

The concert was done and Ringer was looking forward to a real bed and a real shower. Or to anywhere besides this crazy not-Woodstock. He shoved another dufflebag of junk into the van while Hack dodged packing work by staying in Lupus form.

"So can we stay at the Sunset Sea Sept for a while? Is that okay?" Joné's stereo played some cool r&b while she checked over the route on her Visor, websurfing in the tail of the van with one leg dangling in the grass and the other tucked beneath her. They had already started strategy for the protests in Seattle: thousands were gathering, Garou and Kin not least among them, to protest the globalization that made Pentex and its litter of corporations so powerful. Joné had logged them into a chatroom where all kinds of protestors, labor unions, women's groups, native peoples, gay rights activists, on and on, were swapping information, places to stay, places to eat (especially important if you were a vegan, she'd explained), what everyone was going to do when, even lyrics of songs and MP3 files of

the music for everyone that wanted to sing, to shout, *Ya Basta!* ("Enough!"). It sounded cool as hell; Ringer was happy just to be going somewhere, doing something that made a difference, but with people that, well, really cared about him.

Mandy finished rolling up a tent atop a groundsheet and smiled. "Yeah. There's plenty of room; you guys would be great there. If you'll teach martial arts—"

"And interior decorating?" *Gaia*, Ringer thought, sweating in boiling New York *sun, I am the luckiest guy alive. They're even kewl with me being with another Garou.*

"Only if you want to. Is that all of the stuff from the tents?"

"Yeah, his and my stuff's in my car already. We're all ready to go." Guy thing: take what you need, pack it and get moving. *Girls were different*, Ringer thought. *Or is that sexist? Hell if I know.*

"California. And then—" Ringer took advantage of Hack's inattention to dive for him.

"Seattle. Gaiadammit, Seattle!" Ringer grabbed the wolf and dumped him whining into the car.

• • •

Fetishes

Dice of Challenge

Level One, Gnosis 5

This is a pair of dice carved from amber or bone and inlaid with mother-of-pearl, malachite, etc. Philodox use these dice to settle disputes when the Garou at odds will not agree to their judgement. An Ancestor who judged fairly must animate this fetish.

The judge brings out the dice and allows both disputants to handle them, then prays to Gaia to resolve the issue, spending one Gnosis for each Garou involved in the quarrel. He then allows the disputants to roll the dice. The Garou whose cause is "right" (as Unicorn would define it), if either disputant counts, will always win; if both disputants have equally just causes, the dice always come up tied.

Tattoo of True Shape

Level Two, Gnosis 6

This fetish is usually a tattoo or scar, although it can also be worn as a piercing. An octopus-spirit or other shapeshifting spirit is bound into the fetish. Developed by the Ragabash Soldier-of-Paradise, it contours the Garou's shapeshifting to make him comfortable and functional in any space. Thus the huge Crinos form might become thicker-bodied and smaller in a confined corridor, more able to move or fight. The Hispo would fit into a tiny elevator by being taller and more erect, though its four-footed stance and fighting claws would not change. A Garou can shift from Homid to Lupus while in a cramped tunnel without the Crinos shape being a problem.

The tattoo must be activated during shapeshifting; it's impossible to spend a Rage point to shift forms and activate the tattoo in the same turn. The five forms are still recognizable no matter what the fetish does, and it does not enable Garou to take new forms. This fetish is especially helpful to Garou who invade Black Spiral labyrinths and other alien Wyrm-spaces. Whether the Black Spirals themselves have learned of it is not known.

MET: A Garou activating this fetish may not spend Rage to shift forms during the same turn. He suffers no size-related difficulties due to his surroundings.

Belt of the Unicorn

Level Two, Gnosis 6

This is a belt made from white leather in which a Gaffling of Unicorn dwells. When it is worn, it protects the wearer from ingested poison, including Wyrm-venoms, and from all natural sickness; radioactive and supernatural toxins and corrosives that are absorbed through the skin or injected are still a danger. No roll is necessary.

MET: While wearing the Belt of the Unicorn, the Garou suffers no ill effects from ingested poisons or natural sickness. Radioactive or supernatural toxins, corrosives that damage the skin or are injected are still dangerous.

Cup of the Aftcorn

Level Two, Gnosis 6

This carved and covered cup is said to be made of Unicorn horn. The truth of this is unknown. These cups are handed down in a few of the old European septs of the Children; one such is in Switzerland. A healing spirit must enter this fetish.

System: Any substance causing harm is neutralized when poured into this cup. With a Gnosis roll against the Intelligence + Science of the poisoner, the holder of the cup can even recognize the type of poison by the changes in the cup's shimmer or color. If the holder botches, the cup will crack and be ruined.

MET: Any harmful substance poured into the cup becomes neutralized. With a Static Gnosis Challenge (difficulty six Traits), the holder may recognize the type of poison. Losing the challenge results in the cup cracking.

Mirror of Princes

Level Three, Gnosis 7

This precious treasure is a mirror of bronze with two faces. It was created by the Golden Heart Sept in the time of Christine de Pisan, and serves as a corrective to the vanity of earthly rulers. When the mirror's user holds up one face, anyone looking into the mirror sees the worst thing that she has ever done, or the worst thing that is true about herself, and cannot deny or escape this. The other face brings knowledge about the best in oneself. The Storyteller should invent uses for this mirror.

Comforter of the Architect

Level Three, Gnosis 5

This is a bedquilt made from scraps of old clothes and embroidered with ancient Garou designs. A Jaggling of the powerful spirit called the Architect of Sleep is stitched into the quilt. Any Garou sleeping in the quilt may pass one of her Abilities to a packmate. Before going to sleep, she speaks to the packmate about the Ability (a "bedtime story"), and then while she is truly asleep the packmate will possess the Ability in question.

To activate the fetish, Garou makes a Wits + Expression roll, with the difficulty being the packmate's Willpower, and spends a Gnosis point. If the situation is stressful, the Storyteller may force the sleeper to make a Willpower roll against her own Willpower to fall asleep. The Ability can be one that the packmate does not have, but cannot be one totally alien to the recipient; for instance, a human cannot be lent Primal-Urge.

MET: The Garou makes a Static Mental Challenge against his packmate's Willpower and spends a Gnosis. With success, the Garou may pass one Ability to his packmate, who possesses it while the Garou sleeps beneath the quilt. Only one Garou may sleep beneath the quilt at a time, and only one Ability may be passed on. This lasts for as long as the Garou sleeps, or one session.

Pilgrim's Staff

Level Three, Gnosis 7

This staff supports pilgrims (either Garou or Kin) as they trek from place to place on great peace pilgrimages. The Brighton Caern was the first to bear such staves in the modern world, although the Children carried them long ago. When the pilgrim begins his journey, the staff is a simple wooden or bamboo stick, with a spirit of travel bound within.

The pilgrim must walk from caern to caern across the land. At each caern that the pilgrim visits, speaking out for peace and gathering followers, artisans among the Kinfolk carve the caern's symbols into the staff and attach ribbons, banners, and so on with the caern's colors and signs. (Caerns may choose not to participate). When the pilgrim finally arrives at his goal, he will have one extra die to use in peacemaking

rolls (of any sort) for each caern represented; these extra dice last for one day per caern represented. Some such pilgrims have wandered for years; Janine Olive-Branches, an elderly Garou from France, has walked for four decades collecting caern tokens against the War of the Apocalypse....

MET: With each caern that participates in the Pilgrim's Staff, the Garou who bears it gains one free retest to use during peace negotiations. The retests are represented as a pool; only one retest may be used in a single challenge, and the second result must stand.

Unbroken Cord

Level Four, Gnosis 6

This appears to be a length of hemp cord knotted and braided into elaborate patterns. Lengths vary, but there will usually be enough to make necklaces, belts, etc., for a pack. A unity-spirit (such as the spirit of a flock of birds) is bound into it.

When the pack leader wishes, she may spend 1 Gnosis and share one of her abilities, such as a Gift or skill, with any pack member. She can only share with as many pack members as she has current Gnosis. One use for this is to share skills or abilities; another is to aid pack members by giving them the leader's Rage or Gnosis. The effects last for one scene.

MET: The pack leader spends one Gnosis and may share a single Ability or Gift with her pack. No pack member can receive a Gift that is higher than her ability to perform (for example, a Garou who can only perform Basic Gifts may not use an Advanced Gift). This effect lasts for one scene.

Chalice of Renewal

Level Six, Gnosis 8

This mystic chalice of gold appeared to Garret Faithful and his warriors as they sat at meat before going to the Amazon. It is known to have appeared from time to time throughout the Children's legends. Some say it held Mother Gaia's tears when she wept for her children, the five slain Garou pups who founded the tribe. Others claim that it was the cup sought by Arthur's knights. Its powers are certain. Only one such chalice has ever existed.

One new moon in three, the chalice fills with seawater. Anyone who drinks this primeval saltwater falls into a deep sleep wherein they have a vision of Gaia.

This vision is different each time but always contains the sorrow of a mother for her fallen children and the renewal of life with the morning. These are the memories of Gaia, but also relate to the dreamer's own life and work.

On waking, the dreamer is cured of all diseases or wounds.

Talens

The Final Draught

This powerful potion is made by ritemasters who are also herbalists. Portia Tucker, Child of Gaia and survivor of the Civil War, was one of the last who knew how to make it. Its ingredients include wolfsbane and heart's ease as well as alcohol. When consumed, the drinker can Change only once more before it takes effect, and thereafter cannot shapeshift ever again. She remains Garou in all ways, including rites and Gifts, but is trapped in one form till death. Uses for this drug vary. Septs have used it as a punishment for breakers of the Litany, but some older Children of Gaia have used it as a form of retirement (or suicide) after a lifetime of service. As the drinker cannot shapeshift for any reason (even if Gnosis drops to zero), some take it, enter Crinos and go to death in battle. Metis have even used it to ensure that they will not break the Veil by sleeping or dying to reveal their Crinos form.

New Metis Disfigurements

• **Scaly Skin:** You are covered with scales in your Crinos and Hispo form; in Homid, Glabro and Lupus, the scales are limited to small patches on your back, shoulders and hips. Your Appearance is lowered by 1, and other Garou don't like looking at you. However, reptilian shapeshifters may actually regard you favorably. Some metis with this disfigurement are prone to strange and inchoate dreams of long ago; the reason is unknown.

MET: In Crinos and Hispo form, lose all beneficial Social Traits relating to appearance (*Alluring, Gorgeous*, etc.) and gain the Negative Social Traits *Repulsive* x 3. You also suffer a two-Trait Social penalty during interactions with other Garou or fur-bearing shifters while you are in Crinos or Hispo. Should you interact with Mokolé, you do not suffer any Social Trait loss or penalty.

• **Long Ears:** You have long, donkeylike ears in all your forms but Homid. In your Homid form, your ears are simply big and ugly. Followers of Mule may actually consider you favored by their totem, but other Garou find your ears a repulsive trait, the mark of prey rather than a predator.

MET: Gain the Negative Social Trait *Repulsive*, and wear a tag to indicate your deformity.

New Skills

Indeed, Asoka the Beloved wishes all beings non-injury, balance and restraint, even toward the offensive.

And this is the best conquest, Conquest by the Way

— Edict of Asoka, 250 BC

Mediation

"All right, then," William Great Wings said with some relief, "these are the final terms?"

"Yes," growled the massive Get on one side of the stone table. "We will withdraw our packs from this territory, and not cross this boundary again without permission, so long as we are not further provoked."

"And we," growled the Wendigo on the other side, "will pay ten Bane Arrows and one Baneskin 'wergild' as our... apology for the... unfortunate death of your tribesman, and harry your packs no more."

"Good," said William. "That sounds quite fair. Gaia blesses the both of you for your wisdom."

You are skilled in conflict resolution and "talking things out." Whether or not you have renounced violence, you are able to practice alternatives to it. This is a difficult skill for Garou to learn, and some Kin learn it as a matter of course.

- • You kept your siblings from fighting over the prize from the Grain Flakes box.
- •• You manage to talk you and your pals out of bar fights on a regular basis.
- ••• Your pack works together well because you keep the peace.
- •••• Diplomat behind the scenes at moots.
- ••••• You could reconcile a Get to a Black Spiral — not that you'd want to.

Iskakku — The Way of the Staff

The whir of wood through the air died down as Melanie gave the staff one final spin, brought it to an immediate standstill before her chest, then saluted her opponent. In return, he shook his head, stood up with some difficulty, and bowed to her before melting back from the Glabro into Homid.

"Point taken," he grimaced, feeling at his jaw. "All right, all right, I'll quit nagging the elders to give me Thousand-Songs' klaive. A fetish weapon's nothing without skill." His grin widened. "But you know, you never told me whether your staff's a fetish or not." He eyed the length of rosewood appraisingly.

Melanie sighed and shook her head.

The quarter staff (or bo, if you prefer) is one of the most simple yet profound weapons known. It is nothing more than a pole with no sharp edges or points, yet its use relies on all the fundamental techniques for all major weapons. Additionally, although the staff incorporates these techniques, it does not inherit their deadly force. In this sense, it is the perfect weapon for the Children of Gaia as it allows for a widely varied range of fighting options but focuses on the immobilization and disabling of opponents.

While the word Iskakku is Sumerian in origin, it by no means should be thought that this style of fighting is a Sumerian martial arts form. Rather, it is the accumulation of generations of Children fighting lore, a mishmash of various fighting styles and techniques that all utilize either the staff or some other similar pole weapon. The names used for this style are meant to reflect upon the Sumerian hero, Harsag Zalazalag — "Peak Which Emits the Brilliance." A Garou who was conscripted into the army of Kish, he refused to use the war axes assigned to him by his commander. Instead, he broke the blade off a long-hafted ax and chose the simple pole as his weapon. The commander, as punishment, forced him to defend himself with his makeshift staff as five other ax-wielding solders were set upon him. He defeated them all, taking no lives, and was allowed to keep his staff. Many consider him the forebear of this style in spirit only, since most of the maneuvers cannot be traced back as far as Sumeria.

The art has practitioners among both Garou and Kin, and masters are not jealous of their art, unlike *Kailindorani*. With the departure of the Stargazers, the adepts of Iskakku have attracted more attention, as tutelage in Kailindo, never easy to find, has become nearly unobtainable. Anyone can find a staff easily, although many masters have a favorite bamboo grove where they cut them. (Bamboo is light, strong, costs nothing, and does not harm the bamboo plant when it's cut, as bamboo is a form of grass and not a tree). Some bamboo groves near caerns have awakened spirits and allow a +1 to dice pools for the user of a staff from their canes. Garou must propitiate the spirit by tending the grove carefully and preventing harm to the plants. Many masters of Iskakku dedicate or adapt the staff so that it grows to fit the huge paws of the Crinos shape and disappears in Hispo and Lupus.

The style itself has no official path, but certain maneuvers are only possible once a certain amount of skill is attained. In game terms, each maneuver has a requirement in dots of Iskakku that must be attained before the maneuver may be attempted. Alternatively, a Child of Gaia who has four or more dots in Melee and specializes in the staff may use the maneuvers as if she had her Melee skill minus two in Iskakku.

- • Novice: You can use a staff to attack or defend.
- •• Practiced: You know the basics of disabling your opponents.

••• Competent: You are a flurry of blows and blocks.

•••• Expert: Shaolin monks stand up and take notice.

••••• Master: You're almost more dangerous in Homid with a staff than in Crinos with your teeth and claws.

Iskakku Maneuvers

• Attack and Block: You may substitute your Iskakku skill for Melee when using a staff in combat.

•• *Mahasu Qatu* (Hand Smite): When being attacked by someone using another melee weapon, the character may opt to make a parry that also doubles as an attempt to dislocate the attacker's wrist. This not only knocks the oncoming attack away, but also potentially disables his opponent. The defender makes an Iskakku + Dex roll (difficulty 8). If the number of successes exceeds the attacker's successes, then the attack is not only successfully deflected, but the attacker's wrist becomes dislocated and he may no longer use that hand until he heals (the equivalent of healing a level of bashing damage).

Roll: Dex + Iskakku **Difficulty:** 8

Damage: Special **Actions:** Special

•• *Tammabukku Istu Kur* (Dragon emerges from mountain): As a sudden departure from the usual series of swings, the character suddenly thrusts the staff forward as he would normally a spear. This blow is aimed at the face and may not be attempted more than once in a row.

Roll: Dex + Iskakku **Difficulty:** Normal

Damage: +2 Dice **Actions:** 1

•• *Tabalu Kur* (Take away the land): With a sweep of the staff, the attacker may attempt to trip his opponent, forcing him to the ground. The attacker rolls Dex + Iskakku (difficulty 8) while the defender resists with Dex + Athletics (difficulty 7). If the attacker has more successes, then the defender falls. Otherwise he remains standing.

Roll: Dex + Iskakku **Difficulty:** 8

Damage: Special **Actions:** 1

••• *Isten Kima Ummanate* (One as an army): The staff can be wielded in such a way that both ends may be used to attack in quick succession. When using the technique, the character splits his attack dice in half, using the first (and larger if not an even split) pool for his initial attack and the second pool for another attack. While these attacks aren't as threatening as full swing, it tends to force the opponent to defend himself from the flurry of blows just to avoid being hit. All damage done with these attacks is one die less.

Roll: Dex + Iskakku **Difficulty:** Normal

Damage: -1 Die **Actions:** 1

•••• *Sepu Istu An* (Foot from heaven): The character uses his staff to vault himself through the air and deliver a powerful kick to his opponent. The attacker first must have a little running room, and then roll his Strength + Athletics (difficulty 5) to determine if he can vault far enough to his opponent. The distance vaulted is up to 8 feet per success. Upon landing, he rolls Dexterity + Brawl (difficulty 7) to deliver a powerful kick to his opponent. Regular combat rules apply to this attack.

Roll: Dex + Brawl **Difficulty:** 7

Damage: Str +3 **Actions:** 2

•••• *Sepsu Sepu* (Powerful Foot): In addition to the extra attack allowed by Isten Kima Ummanate, the character may now divide his attack dice into three pools and use the third for a kick. Using all three blows is usually reserved for fighting lots of untrained combatants.

••••• *Adannu Lukur Daku* (Appointed time of the enemy's demise): The master of Iskakku often ends the fight before it really begins. He stands in wait for his opponent's first attack; he parries with one end of the staff while moving past his opponent and then delivers a powerful blow to the back of the head with the other end. If stuck with precision, the blow to the cerebellum is enough to knock nearly anyone unconscious. The defender must first make a successful parry (difficulty 7) and then make a Dex + Iskakku roll (difficulty 8) to attack. If successful, the damage dealt is not applied as health levels of damage but is compared to the opponent's Stamina. If the damage is greater than his Stamina, the opponent is rendered unconscious. This imaginary damage cannot be soaked.

Roll: Dex + Iskakku **Difficulty:** 8

Damage: Normal **Actions:** 2

MET: *Iskakku* must be bought as a separate, normal Ability. Those who have Melee with a specialization in Staff may substitute their *Melee* Ability (minus two levels) for *Iskakku* during retests. No martial art may be used during frenzy — the mind is too overwrought with Rage to think clearly enough for martial arts of any kind.

Each maneuver is marked by how many levels of Iskakku the Garou must learn before she can attempt the maneuver. These maneuvers are gained when she purchases the next level of Iskakku.

One Trait Attack and Block: You may substitute your *Iskakku* skill for *Melee* when using a staff in combat.

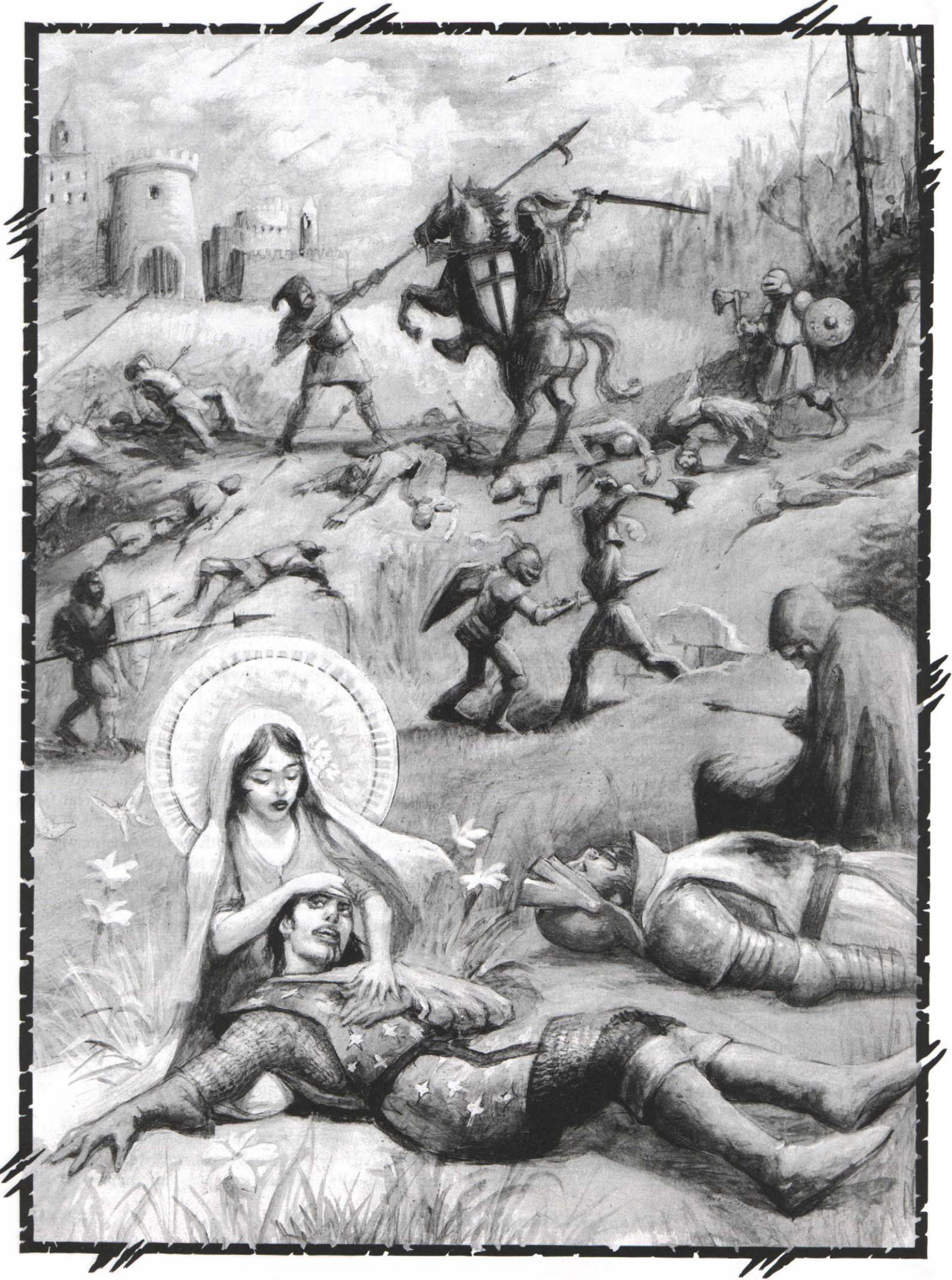
Two Traits *Mahasu Qatu* (Hand Smite): With a successful Physical Challenge (retest with *Iskakku*), you may dislocate your attacker's wrist (equivalent of one level of bashing damage). Until the damage is healed, that hand may not be used in combat.

Two Traits *Tammabukku Istu Kur* (Dragon Emerges from Mountain): With a successful Physical Challenge (retest *Iskakku*), once per combat, you may thrust your staff at your opponent's face. The attack inflicts two levels of bashing damage.

Two Traits *Tabalu Kur* (Take Away the Land): By sweeping your staff, you can knock your opponent to the ground. Engage your opponent in a Static Physical Challenge against seven Traits (in the event of ties, compare your *Iskakku* score to his *Athletics*). With success, your opponent must fall to the ground. Getting back on his feet follows normal combat rules.

Four Traits *Sepu Istu An* (Foot from Heaven): This maneuver requires two actions to perform. You use your staff to vault yourself through the air, delivering a powerful kick to your target. You must first have running room, then make a Physical Challenge (retest *Athletics*) to make the vault. On landing, a second Physical Challenge (retest *Brawl*) is necessary to inflict the damage (which may be bashing or lethal depending on your form and Storyteller discretion).

Five Traits *Adannu Lukur Daku* (Appointed Time of the Enemy's Demise): This maneuver requires two actions. With your enemy's first attack, make a challenge to parry the blow. With success, you may make a Physical Challenge (retest Iskakku) to attack. Success on your attack challenge allows you to strike the opponent on the back of the head with your staff, knocking them unconscious for the next three rounds.



Chapter Four: Flowers and Seeds

A living planet is a much more complex metaphor for deity than just a bigger Father, with a bigger fist. If an omniscient, all-powerful Dad ignores your prayers, it's taken personally. Hear only silence long enough, and you start wondering about his power. His fairness. His very existence.

But if a World-Mother doesn't reply, Her excuse is simple. She never claimed conceited omnipotence. She has countless others clinging to her apron strings, including myriad species unable to speak for themselves. To Her elder offspring She says — go raid the fridge. Go play outside. Go get a job.

Or better yet, lend me a hand! I have no time for idle whining.

— David Brin, *Glory Season*

The Children of Gaia, like most tribes, are united by a common ideology. And like most tribes, that common ideology — in this case, a longing for the elusive goal of "peace" — in no way ensures that any two Children will see eye-to-eye on the best way of achieving their goals. Most Children stress the importance of mediation between warring factions — but fight the hordes of the Wyrm with claws, teeth and whatever else it takes. Some offer quarter to enemies that seem repentant, willing to take the risk of betrayal in the hopes of redeeming a soul that all others would consider lost. Others believe the only peace they can grant the Fallen is the peace of the grave. The Children of Gaia must blend the ideals of Unicorn — chivalry, mercy and peace — with their duty to Gaia — to act as Her claws. It's not an easy task.

The following Children of Gaia exemplify not only the tribal ideals, but also the tribe's diversity. Some are wise beyond their years, blessed with an insight they put to good use in their struggle; others are all too guilty of the mistakes and failings that plague all the Garou. Some are (or will be) the pride of the tribe; others, regrettably, showcase the weak points in the culture that Unicorn's children have built for themselves. All of them, starting templates and legendary heroes alike, are representative of all interesting Children of Gaia everywhere — far from saints, but nonetheless still somehow tied to the ideals of Unicorn, whether they like it or not.

Contrary

Quote: *Hey, stupid, that light is green!*

Prelude: Your metis birth was a source of confusion and pain to you from the start. At least your mother tried to keep you — a thankless task, to say the least, further complicated by her duties away from the sept. Your mind, Mom told you, was darkened, and fits of madness take you now and again. It made childhood... difficult.

Your First Change was during a fit; you don't even remember it, can't recall whether you became wolf or human. With that, your mother surrendered you to the other metis of the sept. They became your new family, introducing you to your auspice duties and the rites of Mule. You hope to do both them and your mother proud by being the best Ragabash that you can be, fits of madness or no.

Concept: You exemplify the No-Moon as contrary and questioner of the ways — perhaps a little *too* much. At moots you recite a strange kind of inverted Litany, insisting that strangers should be allowed to walk into caerns unannounced and that Garou should have sex with each other! When the backward interpretation of the Litany is helpful, you are there to say it was the truth all along. When it isn't — well, that makes the Philodox look good, right?

Roleplaying Notes: You're contrary, but not as a joke; you legitimately believe that playing devil's advocate is a good and necessary part of any important decision. Tell stories in a reversed way so as to highlight the cruelty and prejudice of Garou (and human). When you creatively misinterpret things that you see or that people say and do, allow them to misinterpret you and your ideas: fair is fair. Act contrary about half the time, and refuse to be predictable; always keep them *thinking* about what you're saying. Anyone can laugh at you, but they should feel a little bit uneasy at the same time. No one save yourself really knows when you're mad (or do you?).

Equipment: Staff, army surplus hand-me-downs, battered lunchbox full of trail mix and luncheon meat

Children of Gaia

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Breed: Metis
Auspice: Ragabash
Camp:

Pack Name:
Pack Totem:
Concept: Contrary

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●○○○	Charisma	●●●○○	Perception	●●●○○
Dexterity	●●●○○	Manipulation	●●●○○	Intelligence	●●○○○
Stamina	●●○○○	Appearance	●●○○○	Wits	●●●●●

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●○○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○	Computer	○○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○	Crafts	○○○○○	Enigmas	●○○○○
Brawl	●○○○○	Drive	○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○
Dodge	●●●○○	Etiquette	●●○○○	Law	●●○○○
Empathy	●●○○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Linguistics	●○○○○
Expression	●●○○○	Leadership	○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Occult	●○○○○
Primal-Urge	●●○○○	Performance	●●○○○	Politics	●●○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Stealth	●○○○○	Rituals	●●○○○
Subterfuge	●●○○○	Survival	●○○○○	Science	○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds		Gifts	Gifts
Fetish	●○○○○	Create Element	
Rites	●●●○○	Open Seal	
Totem	●●○○○	Resist Pain	
	○○○○○	Persuasion	
	○○○○○		

Renown

Glory ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Honor ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Wisdom ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Rank

Rage ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Gnosis ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Willpower ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Health

Bruised		☐
Hurt	-1	☐
Injured	-1	☐
Wounded	-2	☐
Mauled	-2	☐
Crippled	-5	☐
Incapacitated		☐

Tribal Weakness

WEAK VEIL
WITNESSES AT +4
ON DELIRIUM CHART

Hedonist

Quote: *Let's party!*

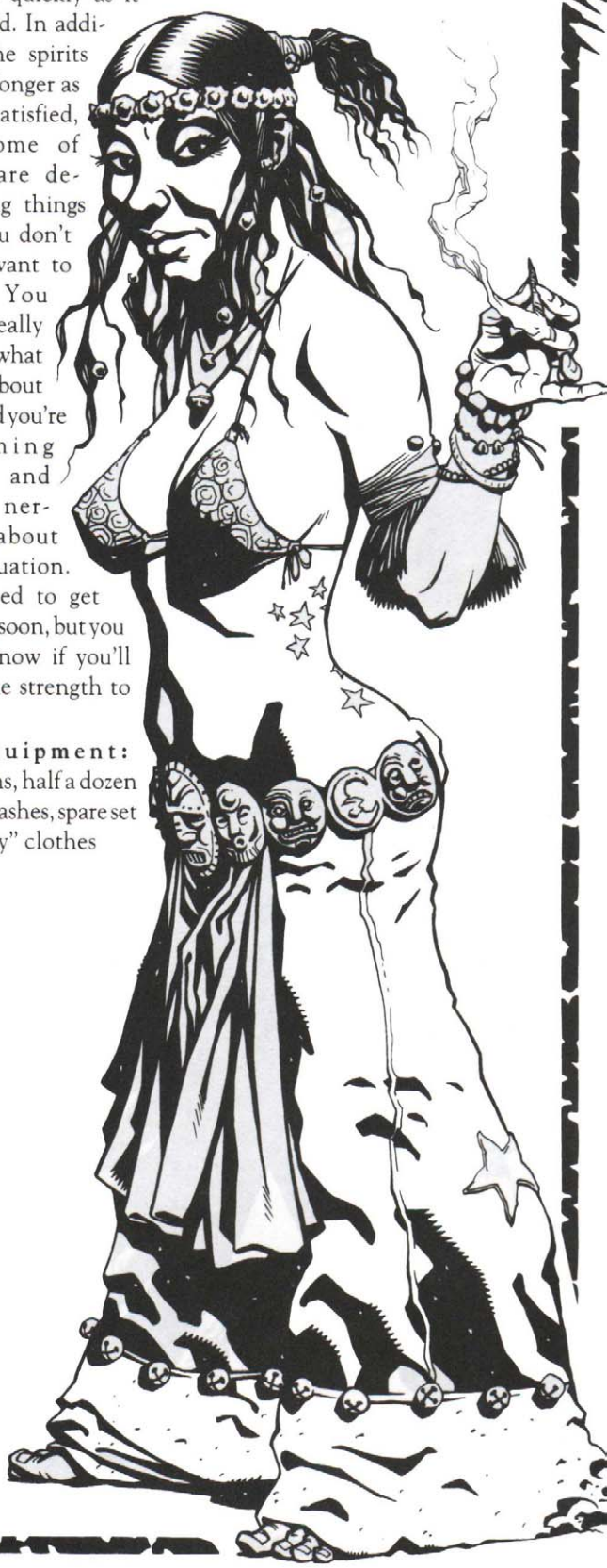
Prelude: You were born to a wealthy Kinfolk family and raised to aspire to high standards of living. Unlike most other homids, you were carefully groomed to the ideals of tribal culture (even if they didn't tell you about the tribe itself until much later). The peace and love stuff was pretty good, but what you really liked was the permissive attitude toward lovemaking and altered states of consciousness. Your teenage years were quite a ride.

It went kind of sideways with your First Change. It was the first time you'd actually hurt someone — it didn't help that the guy died. But your folks got a great lawyer to help out the sept's efforts to cover things up, and you were never implicated. What's more, the fact that he was a high-school bully made it difficult for you to feel all that guilty about the event. You spent the learning period between your First Change and your Rite of Passage studying during the day and partying at night, learning the Bacchanalian side of tribal ritual. To this date, you've been able to keep yourself from thinking about your dead tormentor's face.

Concept: You're a high school stoner turned apprentice ritemaster, expert in the ritual use of teacher plants, drugs and alcohol. You like having a good time: drink, weed, sex and dancing. The spirits do too, so why complain? Some spirits like to possess you in return for giving you knowledge or using their powers while they are embodied in you. Of course, while they are around, they want to sample the pleasures of mortal existence, and you have no trouble obliging.

Roleplaying Notes: This life is a trip, but you are beginning to see some problems. Heavy drug use is damaging your health and creating some frightening lapses in your memory, and shapeshifting no longer gets rid of the aftereffects as quickly as it once did. In addition, the spirits are no longer as easily satisfied, and some of them are demanding things that you don't really want to do. You aren't really certain what to do about this, and you're becoming more and more nervous about the situation. You need to get control soon, but you don't know if you'll have the strength to do it.

Equipment: condoms, half a dozen secret stashes, spare set of "party" clothes



Children of Gaia

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Breed: omi
Auspice: Theurge
Camp:

Pack Name:
Pack Totem:
Concept: e onist

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●○○○	Charisma	●●●○○	Perception	●●●○○
Dexterity	●●●○○	Manipulation	●●●●○	Intelligence	●●○○○
Stamina	●○○○○	Appearance	●●●○○	Wits	●●●○○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	○○○○○	Animal Ken	●○○○○	Computer	●○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○	Crafts	●●○○○	Enigmas	●○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○	Drive	●○○○○	Investigation	●○○○○
Dodge	●○○○○	Etiquette	●●○○○	Law	●○○○○
Empathy	●●○○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Linguistics	●○○○○
Expression	●○○○○	Leadership	○○○○○	Medicine	●●○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Occult	●○○○○
Primal-Urge	○○○○○	Performance	●●○○○	Politics	●○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Stealth	●○○○○	Rituals	●●●○○
Subterfuge	●○○○○	Survival	○○○○○	Science	●○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds		Gifts	Gifts
Conta ts	●●○○○	Smell o Man	
in ol	●●○○○	Sense yrm	
Resour es	●●●○○	Resist Pain	
Rites	●●●●○	eightene Senses	
	○○○○○		

Renown

Glory: ○○○○○○○○○○ ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Honor: ○○○○○○○○○○ ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Wisdom: ●●●○○○○○○○ ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Rank

Rage: ●●○○○○○○○○ ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Gnosis: ●●○○○○○○○○ ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Willpower: ●●●●○○○○○○ ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Health

Bruised		☐
Hurt	-1	☐
Injured	-1	☐
Wounded	-2	☐
Mauled	-2	☐
Crippled	-5	☐
Incapacitated		☐

Tribal Weakness

WEAK VEIL:
WITNESSES AT +4
ON DELIRIUM CHART

Gambler

Quote: *Fate is not always fair, but she's real. Now, pick a number, high or low.*

Prelude: You were an avid game-player even as a kid, loving any chance to beat someone else, any way to win. You couldn't explain the strange itch within you, but friendly competition seemed to salve it somewhat. How often you lost and how much wasn't important. This tended to get you into trouble; your increasing involvement with gambling as a teenager scared your parents. One day, gang members came looking for their money, and you discovered that you were a lot tougher in a fight than you had thought.

The Children of Gaia took you in, explaining what you'd been all along and how you could find satisfaction by coming to terms with your nature. You're pretty reluctant to take up your duties as a judge, but you understand some things: nature is a random entity, and so chance is exactly as important as you always thought. When they told you about spirits that fed on addictions, even gambling addictions, you were outright frightened. But the importance of gamecraft to the Garou was pure relief — now your skills have more meaning than ever before.

Concept: You're a recovering gambling addict who's trying to learn the purer ideas behind games of chance and skill. Your risk addiction is satisfied by the thrill of Garou deeds, and you are much in demand for gamecraft at moots. Your fascination with all the arts of the game makes you a model arbitrator for challenges of that sort, although you like staredown and combat challenges much less. Games of chance are your specialty, although you're learning that games of pure mental acumen such as chess and go are a much better test of wits; but card games, matching luck with cleverness and people skills, are your favorite.

Roleplaying Notes: Research the odds before a confrontation; you don't want to lose. Act cool and secretive, hiding any advantage that you may have. Strive to develop relationships with various spirits of chance and learn more spirit lore, but always try to become even better at your chosen profession of master of the game.

Equipment: Nice set of civilian clothes, sporty BMW, unmarked cards and unweighted dice, library of books on games (Hoyle's, etc.)

Children of Gaia

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Breed: omi
Auspice: Philo o
Camp:

Pack Name:
Pack Totem:
Concept: ambler

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●○○○	Charisma	●●○○○	Perception	●●●●○
Dexterity	●●○○○	Manipulation	●●●●○	Intelligence	●●●○○
Stamina	●●○○○	Appearance	●●●○○	Wits	●●●●○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○	Computer	●○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○	Crafts	○○○○○	Enigmas	●●●○○
Brawl	○○○○○	Drive	●○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○
Dodge	●●○○○	Etiquette	●●○○○	Law	●●○○○
Empathy	●●●○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○
Expression	●●○○○	Leadership	●○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Intimidation	●●○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Occult	○○○○○
Primal-Urge	○○○○○	Performance	●●○○○	Politics	●●○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○	Rituals	○○○○○
Subterfuge	●●●○○	Survival	○○○○○	Science	●○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds		Gifts	Gifts
Conta ts	●●●○○	Persuasion	
Resour es	●●●○○	Truth o aia	
	○○○○○	am eapon	
	○○○○○		
	○○○○○		

Renown

Glory ○○○○○○○○○ ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
Honor ●●●○○○○○○ ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
Wisdom ○○○○○○○○○ ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Rank

Rage ●●●○○○○○○○ ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Gnosis ●○○○○○○○○○ ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Willpower ●●●●○○○○○○ ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Health

Bruised		☐
Hurt	-1	☐
Injured	-1	☐
Wounded	-2	☐
Mauled	-2	☐
Crippled	-5	☐
Incapacitated		☐

Tribal Weakness

WEAK VEIL:
WITNESSES AT +4
ON DELIRIUM CHART

Science Educator

Quote: *Here, class: see how the wolf's foot is adapted to run on forest floors...*

Prelude: You were one of the lucky ones. Your parents were Kinfolk, and they coaxed you to live with your growing Rage and taught you the precepts of Gaian life. Sometimes a relative from the tribe came to visit, doing what little they could to prepare you for your destiny. Your Change came during a hiking trip in the north woods, with no one seriously hurt. When your tribe came to pick you up, you weren't frightened — you were thrilled.

One of the Children took you under her wing, and did her best to make sure that you got the college education you were looking for. Without her constant intervention, using her Gifts to reduce your Rage, you might not have made it through. Although the gibbous moon fills you with too much anger to become a full-time teacher, you've found an interesting alternative — traveling from school to school, educating children between your duties to the sept.

Concept: You work as a science educator, going from school to school and explaining nature in a Gaian way, slipping in an environmental message and using wolf Kin as teaching partners when you can. You also use these presentations as a chance to use your Gifts to smell for Wyrm-taint or lost cubs in each school — there's no more important battleground, in your mind.

Roleplaying Notes: You enjoy teaching like nothing else. Telling stories about the natural world, about wolf packs or other animals, watching your audience learn before your eyes — it's exhilarating. You relish the chance to teach Garou lore when you can; you'd love to someday have a Garou cub of your own. You know a lot of Garou tales, but want to learn more of the Silver Record. Luckily your work allows you to travel, besides providing income. If you have a fault, it's that your idyllic upbringing has somewhat sheltered you from the pain and blood of your people's war — but who knows what the future will bring?

Equipment: Work khakis, library of educational and nature videos, compound of exotic animals

CHILDREN of GAIA

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Breed: omi
Auspice: alliar
Camp:

Pack Name:
Pack Totem:
Concept: S ien e E u ator

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●○○○	Charisma	●●●●○	Perception	●●●○○
Dexterity	●●○○○	Manipulation	●●○○○	Intelligence	●●●●○
Stamina	●●○○○	Appearance	●●○○○	Wits	●●●○○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	○○○○○	Animal Ken	●●●○○	Computer	●○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○	Crafts	○○○○○	Enigmas	○○○○○
Brawl	●○○○○	Drive	●●○○○	Investigation	●●○○○
Dodge	○○○○○	Etiquette	○○○○○	Law	●●○○○
Empathy	●○○○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Linguistics	●○○○○
Expression	●●○○○	Leadership	●○○○○	Medicine	●●○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Occult	○○○○○
Primal-Urge	●○○○○	Performance	●●○○○	Politics	●○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○	Rituals	●○○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Survival	●○○○○	Science	●●●○○

Advantages

Backgrounds		Gifts	Gifts
llies	●○○○○	Smell o Man	
in ol	●●○○○	east Spee h	
Resour es	●●○○○	S allo Rage	
	○○○○○	Sense yrm	
	○○○○○	S ent o the True Form	

Renown

Glory ●●○○○○○○○○ ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Honor ○○○○○○○○○○ ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Wisdom ●○○○○○○○○○ ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Rank

Rage ●●●○○○○○○○ ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Gnosis ●○○○○○○○○○ ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Willpower ●●●●○○○○○○ ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Health

Bruised		☐
Hurt	-1	☐
Injured	-1	☐
Wounded	-2	☐
Mauled	-2	☐
Crippled	-5	☐
Incapacitated		☐

Tribal Weakness

WEAK VEIL:
WITNESSES AT +4
ON DELIRIUM CHART

War-Dancer

Quote: (turn, turn, kick, turn, somersault, full stop and bow)

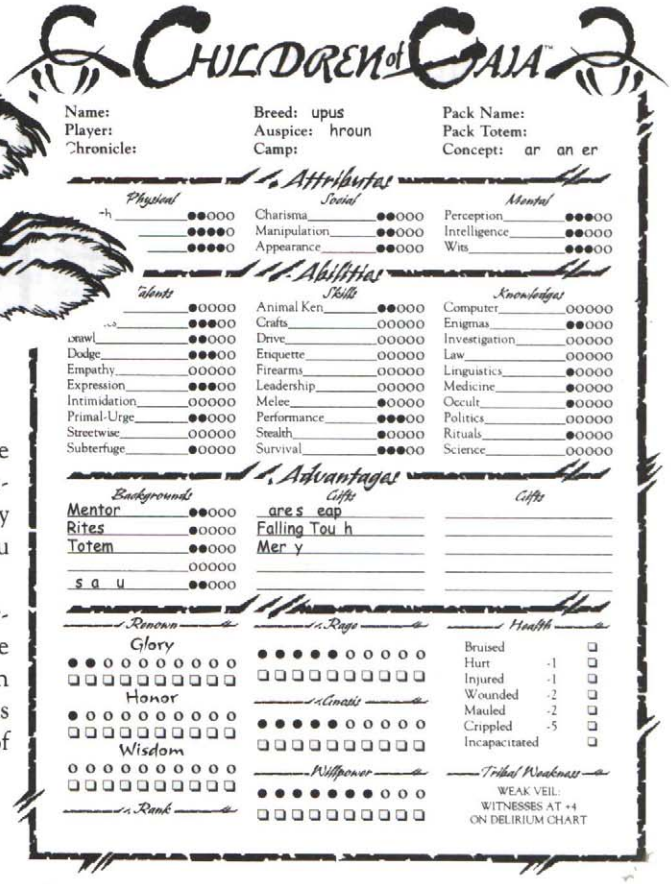
Prelude: You grew up a pup in the forests of Canada, and were separated from your mother and littermates by the rest of the pack before you were fully grown. You wouldn't have made it if a kindly person hadn't taken you in as a pet. However, your growing Rage began to alienate your new neighbors just as it had alienated your pack. Soon your person wound up stranding you by the side of a forest road as a merciful way of getting rid of you. Once again, you were on your own — but this time, Black Spiral Dancers trolling the woods in search of "new blood" found you.

The Dancers got more than they bargained for; your First Change took them by surprise. Their desire to take you alive hampered them, and you killed two, much to their fury. They would surly have overpowered you with experience and numbers if it hadn't been for the intervention of the pack that was chasing them. The pack took you back to a sept, where a wise Child of Gaia taught you to harness your Rage through physical exertion. When it came time for your Rite of Passage, you honored him by petitioning to enter his tribe.

Concept: You're an Ahroun who channels your Rage through physical exercise, dance in particular. As one of the few remaining lupus in the tribe, you provide a useful point of view in moots. You want to become a better warrior but recognize that dancing is a valuable outlet for you. Your intense interest in martial arts, especially Iskakku, led to a similar interest in dance, and you spend some time with a dance troupe in a large city. Your undocumented status as an "immigrant" may cause problems at some point, as you have no identification at all.

Roleplaying Notes: Life as a sometimes-human is interesting, and you would probably not go back to a life as a simple wolf even if you had the chance. Speak little, do rather than say, and be at your most eloquent as a dancer. Savor combat as a chance to express your warrior's soul through the medium of merciful discipline.

Equipment: Iskakku staff, exercise outfit



CHILDREN of GAIA

Name: | Breed: upus | Pack Name:
Player: | Auspice: hroun | Pack Totem:
Chronicle: | Camp: | Concept: ar an er

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
-h	●●○○○	Charisma	●●○○○	Perception	●●●○○
	●●●●○	Manipulation	●●○○○	Intelligence	●●○○○
	●●●●○	Appearance	●●○○○	Wits	●●●○○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
	●○○○○	Animal Ken	●●○○○	Computer	○○○○○
	●●●○○	Crafts	○○○○○	Enigmas	●●○○○
rawl	●●○○○	Drive	○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○
Dodge	●●●○○	Etiquette	○○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Empathy	○○○○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Linguistics	●○○○○
Expression	●●●○○	Leadership	○○○○○	Medicine	●○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○	Melee	●○○○○	Occult	●○○○○
Primal-Urge	●●○○○	Performance	●●●○○	Politics	○○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Stealth	●○○○○	Rituals	●○○○○
Subterfuge	●○○○○	Survival	●●●○○	Science	○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds		Gifts	Gifts
Mentor	●●○○○	are s eap	
Rites	●○○○○	Falling Tou h	
Totem	●●○○○	Mer y	
	○○○○○		
s a u	●●○○○		

Renown: Glory ●●○○○○○○○○ □□□□□□□□□□; Honor ●○○○○○○○○○ □□□□□□□□□□; Wisdom ○○○○○○○○○○ □□□□□□□□□□

Rank

Rage ●●●●●○○○○○ □□□□□□□□□□

Gnosis ●●●●●○○○○○ □□□□□□□□□□

Willpower ●●●●●●●○○○ □□□□□□□□□□

Health

Bruised		☐
Hurt	-1	☐
Injured	-1	☐
Wounded	-2	☐
Mauled	-2	☐
Crippled	-5	☐
Incapacitated		☐

Tribal Weakness

WEAK VEIL: WITNESSES AT +4 ON DELIRIUM CHART

been slain by vampires who wanted the city for their own feasting ground. The pursuit of peace is neither easy nor safe.

Christine de Pisan

Alas, and if it has to be that wars and battles are begun for many reasons and quarrels, then they should also be avoided and shunned by better and more valid reasons, and peace should be sought.

— Christine de Pisan

Gaian ideals were not popular in the Middle Ages of the World of Darkness, when the most zealous and intolerant leaders of the Christian faith shouted down their more moderate brethren and led the crusade against heresies, real and perceived. It was, among other things, a poor time to be a woman. Women mostly kept to their assigned place as wives and mothers, aiding husbands in daily work but getting little or no thanks or praise in return.

Christine de Pisan, a Kinfolk woman associated with the Coeur d'Or (Golden Heart) sept of central France, was different. Widowed young, she turned to writing and produced some volumes of love poetry for a noble patron, writing under her own name. The good reception that her tales of virtue and desire received led her to go further. Inspired by her acquaintance with the Black Furies, but wishing that their savagery could

Peaceweavers

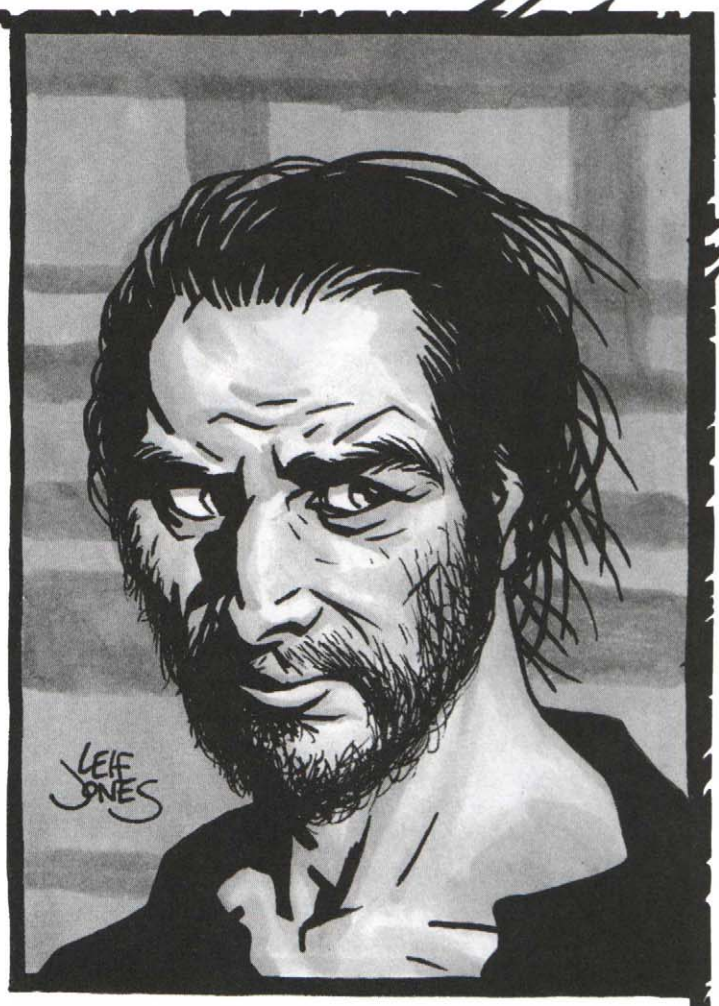
Lore-Speaker Gron

According to the Children of Gaia's Galliards, Lore-Speaker Gron, a hermaphroditic metis, was the Philodox whose impassioned speeches convinced the Garou Nation (who were still one tribe at least in name) to end the Impergium. His-her long association with the stonecarvers and poets of the Balkan settlement called Lepinski Vir by later archaeologists had convinced him-her that endless killing was preventing humans from achieving a culture which could create art and beauty while remaining in harmony with Gaia.

Gron's pack, natives of present-day Anatolia, traveled across the Mother's face for decades making political alliances and earning favors through their works of peace; the resulting goodwill ensured that the motion passed in an Allmoot. The ill-will that the pro-Impergium faction bore toward Gron and the pro-peace faction ended in the division of the Garou Nation between the Fangs and the Children of Gaia, with the Fianna migrating to the northwest to pursue a life of their own. Gron's own family died in a series of attempts to murder him-her. Sadly, Gron died in the struggles over Catal Huyuk, said to be the first city to arise after the Impergium's end; he was said to have

be softened by Gaia's love, she wrote of a *City of Ladies*, in which women could accomplish all things for themselves without the need of male "supervision." On an Umbral journey with a Child of Gaia ally, which she recounted in a tale, she confronted the spirits of wealth, philosophy, beauty and wisdom to find out which spirit was the most powerful in the Tellurian. Her books on peace praised as bravest of all he who seeks an end to war and slaughter, reproving the knights for their bloodlust and cruelty. She reprimanded even the Queen of France for failing to take her husband to task for his war-making, urging all noble ladies to use their high position for good ends. When her influential books won her audiences with the rich and powerful, she used the powers of Gaia to seek peace and justice.

Christine de Pisan was the first woman in all history to support herself by writing, and is honored to this day by the Children for her ideals of peace and equal rights for women. Many Gaians as well as Black Furies claim her as a spiritual and even physical ancestor. Far ahead of her time, her books inspired many modern Children of Gaia to work, write and speak for peace and justice. Some lament that no one listened to her words, while others remain in awe of her boldness in speaking at all.



Raymond Love-Of-The-Goddess

Raymond Hawkins was born in 1770 in the English village of Woolegrave. Son of a Kinfolk schoolteacher and his "mad" Garou wife, he grew up loving the countryside and his parent's charity work among the swarming poor. His First Change took place as he wandered the woods alone, and his parents rejoiced. He went to college on a scholarship and was ordained in a small sect, the Forest Brethren, which combined Christianity with Gaian teaching. The sect's members were mostly Garou and Kin. When the English began to send prisoners to Australia, Raymond volunteered to accompany the Fleet as a chaplain. He then sailed in the prison ship preaching of Gaia's love for all.

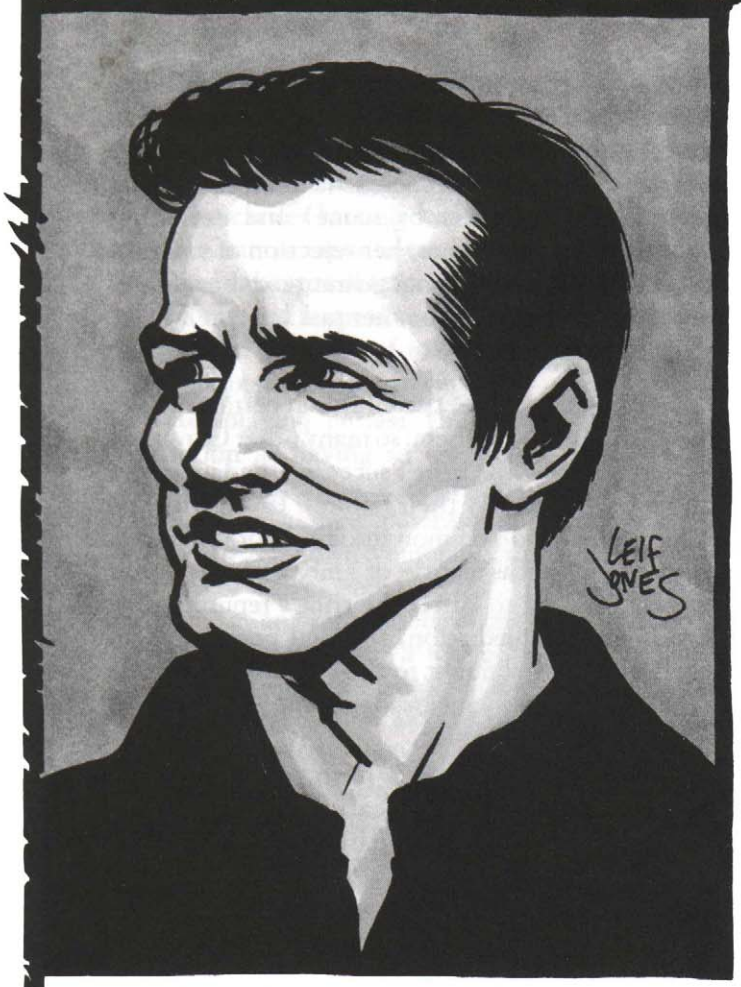
Upon arrival, Raymond was appalled to hear the reports that the Bunyip of legend dwelt in the new land, along with even stranger reptile-shifters. The Silver Fang Earl Blaze of Uffington, the self-appointed leader of the Garou migration to Australia, vowed to proceed with colonization despite this news. How could these long-forgotten "lesser races" save Gaia? The land belonged to those who could use it best.

Raymond protested endlessly for better treatment for the convicts and natives, and was particularly outspoken against Earl Blaze's desire to take caerns from the native shifters if need be. As punishment for his defiance, Blaze sentenced him to Norfolk Island, the grim prison-within-a-prison for convicts who committed heinous crimes on Australian soil. The holy man welcomed this fate; as he said, "Who needs me more than they? And they may listen." He worked side by side with the rapists and murderers for many years; eventually Raymond was released and died in the Hunter River Valley, seeing the Children established on Australian soil.

Elihu Steelwright

Kin are accorded more honor among the Children than among any other Garou tribe, but Elihu Barrett was a great man in his own right. A blacksmith by trade, he was born into a family of Children and Kin attached to a caern in upstate New York. He taught himself French, Spanish, German, Russian, Arabic, Chinese and Hindi, and despite his poverty, worked through letters and personal visits to bring together peace workers, human and Garou, in Europe and North America. His League of Brotherhood was the only Garou organization working for peace throughout the nineteenth century.

Barrett never envied his Garou sister, who died on a dangerous mission to the Shadow Lords' court



to fight serfdom. He supported himself everywhere he went by his own hands, teaching anyone who wished to learn the craft of blacksmithing, urging all workers "to believe that they are worth more for producing food for man and beast than for feeding with their own flesh and blood the hungry mouths of mortar and cannon on fields of human slaughter." He sired two Garou children and died an elderly man, saddened that so many Garou had died in World War I. His family continues his heritage of handwork and peacework to this day and his name still turns heads among the Children and the Bone Gnawers.

Garret Faithful

The Amazon has been a place of testing for many Garou. For the Children of Gaia, it was a challenge in more ways than one. Should they send warriors, reinforcing the Garou Nation's blood lust? Or should they try to make peace, acknowledging Pentex's gains in the jungle?

Garret was born to Kin in a small Oregon town where the Children had a caern on the site of his parents' commune. Descended from Gaian hero Will Everard of the seventeenth century, he grew up roaming the mountains and woods of the Northwest, reading Howard Pyle's King Arthur yarns, and hearing the tales of the Children from his Garou aunt. He became a fierce peacemaker, vowing that Gaia's Children would never again be broken as they had been on St. George's Hill, helping other Garou to settle tribal differences without violence or at least without slaughter. A band of younger Children of Gaia began to follow him from caern to caern. Like Garret, they pledged to wage war only against the aggressors and to spare noncombatants, seeking peace when they could.

When the Amazon War broke out, the Knights of Gaia's Hand (as they were called) joined at once, and the mysterious Chalice of Renewal came to aid them. As the war progressed, Gaia's Hand gained more and more renown. Garret's near-supernatural faith in the Mother amazed them, and stories of his miracles soon spread. Trees walking, rivers running uphill and fatal wounds healed were only the start.

At present Garret is troubled by his own success. He leads a group of packs that have been consistently winning battles, but the War is not over, and he worries that he is simply feeding the Wyrm's heart with violence. Peace would be more difficult, and perhaps it is time to begin putting his talents to use in a different fashion.

Edith Looking-Glass

Edith Kanyuck was born to a Kin family in New York State and studied with Pearl-of-the-River, the Gaian sage. After working with Asian refugees in New York City, she meditated on the human suffering in Southeast Asia. Gaia spoke to Edith and told her to witness the deeds of the Wyrm in flesh there, to be a mirror showing the horror and cruelty to all. The young woman moved to San Francisco and began human rights work, eventually founding Project Vajra ("thunderbolt"), which she continues to head.

Project Vajra is one of the few groups sanctioned by the Garou Nation to regularly visit Asia. The organization sends Garou-only teams (with Kin support groups) into China, Burma-Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand, seeking human rights abuses, infiltrating Chinese slave-labor camps, traveling with hermits, rebels and aboriginal tribes. They have made brief contact with Asia's shapeshifters, who have apparently given them sanction to continue their operations as long as they don't try to take any actual territory for themselves.

Edith has personally gone ten times into the region and emerged with thousands of pages of documentation, photos, video and human stories. She seeks to document cruelty and open human evil to the light of day, to "speak truth to power." The United Nations commission on human rights has heard her group testify several times but has done nothing. Several governments have forbidden her presence (knowing her by name) and even sent soldiers or police after her; her rejection of violence as a means, however, has not guaranteed the safety of those sent to keep her from her task.

Cries Havoc

In the modern age, the Children certainly have their work cut out for them; so many other Garou pay little attention to the tribe's successes, and judge the Children primarily by their failures. Faced with the obstacle of all-too-common disdain, more than one Child takes up the mantle of ambassador to other septs, attempting to better the tribe's reputation by providing more mediation, spiritual power and, as necessary, physical might to the septs who might be in need. Of these ambassadors, one of the most prominent is Cries Havoc.

Cries, due to his metis birth, was steeped in Unicorn's philosophy since learning to speak. Conversely, he never went beyond his caern's bawn until his Rite of Passage. As he grew to adulthood, the young metis thus grew very well educated in the spiritual, cultural and philosophical aspects of Garou life, but was almost completely without practical knowledge of the world outside his sept. Nonetheless, he strove to prove himself worthy of becoming an ambassador and mediator, in service to the rest of the Nation rather than exclusively to his sept. The name "Cries Havoc" he earned after his Rite of Passage — it indicates his tendency to speak of the Apocalypse's horrors in order to stress the importance of intertribal and intersept cooperation, as well as his willingness to go to war for the sake of a treaty or caern defense. Already, he is fairly well known amongst other tribes, as the distinctive ram-horned metis who appears at the doorstep of a caern in peril and offers what he can in the name of brotherhood.

Unfortunately, the greatest obstacle Cries Havoc faces in his efforts to strike accords between tribes is his own metis nature. Although mentally and physically sound, Cries cannot easily move among human society, thanks to the very obvious ram's horns that mark all his forms. This causes no end of difficulty when visiting urban septs or trying to show respect for urban tribes by meeting them on their own ground. Although he knows better than to feel guilty for his own nature, Cries nonetheless is no stranger to metis pain — and he does his best to keep from resenting the people who judge him by his horns rather than his words.

Image: Cries Havoc has just passed 30, and is in excellent health. In Homid form, he has longish brown hair and a full brown beard; he tends to wear simple tunics and breeches of Garou make. In Crinos form, he carries himself with great grace. In all his forms, a pair of ram's horns spirals from his temples, making him impossible to mistake for anything other than a metis. He speaks softly and with conviction, although a faint air of melancholy tends to settle around him from time to time.

Roleplaying Notes: Your life is frustration — frustration at having so few people listen to your proposals, frustration at having so many Garou reject you for your "impure" parentage, frustration at being unable to set down your burden and walk among humans or wolves even for a day. You never truly feel welcome at any sept; it seems sometimes that people would rather listen to a white boy calling himself Wendigo or a scruffy Fianna Ragabash than you. If not for the guiding influence of the half-moon, you might have given up a long time ago; and in your most cynical moments, you can't help but wonder if anyone would care if you did. But you weren't raised to give up; that's not why Unicorn accepted you. So you keep working to call the others together, to show them how alike all Garou are at heart, and you latch on to even the smallest success as the hope that you dearly need. There's really no time left for anything else.

Breed: Metis

Auspice: Philodox

Rank: 3

Physical: Strength 3 (5/7/6/4), Dexterity 2 (2/3/4/4), Stamina 3 (5/6/6/5)

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 3 (2/0/0/0), Appearance 3 (2/0/3/3)

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 1, Brawl 2, Dodge 3, Empathy 3, Expression 2, Intimidation 1, Primal-Urge 1, Subterfuge 1

Skills: Animal Ken 1, Crafts 2, Etiquette 3, Leadership 1, Melee 2, Performance 1, Stealth 1, Survival 2

Knowledges: Enigmas 1, Investigation 1, Law 4 (Garou law), Linguistics 3, Medicine 2, Occult 3, Politics 2, Rituals 2

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Ancestors 1, Contacts 1, Mentor 2

Rage: 3; **Gnosis:** 5; **Willpower:** 6

Gifts: (1) Create Element, Mother's Touch, Resist Pain, Sense Wyrm, Truth of Gaia; (2) Call to Duty, Luna's Armor, Strength of Purpose; (3) Spirit Friend

Rites: Rite of Cleansing, Rite of Contrition, Gathering for the Departed, Rite of Summoning

Fetishes: Cries Havoc carries a fetish staff, with a spirit of justice bound within. The staff inflicts aggravated damage to creatures of the Wyrm, including vampires, lethal damage to other supernaturals not of the Wyrm, and bashing damage to ordinary humans and Gaian Garou.

Samuel "The Skinner" Haight

Possibly the most famous Kinsman of the Garou to have ever existed, Haight is a fascinating example of unrestrained ambition. Son and brother to full-blooded Children of Gaia, he longed to be Garou himself — an obsession that would consume his soul.

In the course of his life, Samuel Haight managed to commit a sequence of atrocities so dire that he became a dark legend among the Garou he had come to hate. He associated with vampires, ranking members of Pentex, and worse on his quest to find some way to become Garou himself. Unfortunately, he found it. A demented cult in India proved to be the last possessors of the Ritual of Sacred Rebirth — a ritual that would allow a human Kinfolk that "gathered" five Garou skins to become a "true" werewolf.

It was during this hunt that the legend of "the Skinner" was born. Werewolves became all too familiar with tales of this vicious Kinfolk that hunted his own relatives with silver knives, taking their skins for

his own. Through guile, treachery and sheer determination, Haight finished his twisted quest, and performed the Wyrmish ritual successfully. The Kinfolk called the Skinner was gone; but the first of the Skin Dancers had been born.

Haight continued on his killing spree even after achieving his goal of becoming Garou. He spread word of the Rite of Sacred Rebirth among other disaffected Kin, and collected more skins on his own to initiate his own closest associates into his new "tribe." He was sighted in the Dark Umbra and the Amazon, wresting more mystical knowledge from each location to boost his own power. He plotted with Black Spiral Dancers, and carried a mighty fetish staff said to contain the soul of a potent sorcerer — and all that sorcerer's powers. Up until the end, nothing seemed capable of quenching his lust for more and more power.

Finally, Haight's ambition was the end of him. His last attempt to add to his own power was a trip to Mexico City, where he sought out the fabled resting place of a millennia-old vampire, hoping that a draught of its blood would grant him immortality on top of his already remarkable prowess. But when he opened the thing's tomb, it woke. It took all of Haight's stolen power to stave the ancient monster off, and even that proved ultimately futile — his magical staff exploded, causing a conflagration that apparently consumed both Haight and vampire alike.

The final fate of Samuel Haight was largely unknown to the Garou Nation until the wraith-haunted Silent Strider, Mephi Faster-than-Death, returned from a trip to the Underworld with news of the Skinner. According to the Strider, Haight's soul was "in no shape to return to the physical world, much less escape its torment — ever." Although the news that the Skinner himself will never return is a great relief to the Nation — and to the Children of Gaia in particular — his legacy nonetheless lives on, in the form of the bastard would-be "tribe" he left behind. While the Skin Dancers continue to encourage Kin to murder their Garou parents, siblings and spouses in a bid for power, no werewolf is safe.

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Seattle, December 3, 1999

The crowd laughed in triumph as the WTO delegates made their announcement. They were leaving; the organization that Joné called "Pentex on Parade" shut down by Turtles and Teamsters. "And the People!" Joné shouted, the crowd cheering her. Ringer felt like he was flying. They said we couldn't do this. Nonviolent force against the world's biggest governments, the world's richest and most Wyrm-riddled organizations. Kids with skateboards and banners, and we won!

The pack exchanged backslaps and high-fives with high-school environment clubs, Sisters for Sustainability, SaneFreeze members in antinuke T-shirts, Catholic priests protesting Endron's murders in Nigeria, and Kinfolk from a dozen Gaian organizations. The crowd filled the whole block in front of the William Walker Hotel.

A band was playing a Baka Beyond tune that Ringer vaguely recognized, and a Choctaw dance troupe in baggy shorts, t-shirts and feathered headpieces was celebrating victory.

Suddenly the noise of shouts broke in. "Cops! Look out!" *Why now?*, Ringer wondered for a moment, then struggled to keep his balance as two women ran by him and into him in panic. His back ached from kidneys trying to expel the tear gas.

The dancers fled, the band trying to carry their drums and didgeridoos. The crowd was breaking up, screams of fright as the cops showed up with shields and clubs to impose "order." Behind faceplates they looked fiercely pleased to be doing their job, angry after the rioters had destroyed so much and attacked so many people. Hack was nowhere in sight. Police vehicles moved into the ends of the block, voices blaring from loudspeakers. "Secure the area. Secure the area." Damn, Ringer thought, this is looking bad. A Kins-

man, Mike, was down from tear gas and Ringer was trying to wash his eyes when he felt a cop grab him — *don't Rage!*, he barely remembered in time — and shove him onto the ground. Next to him another cop was beating a skater kid, the boy's screams unheeded. *Rage, and they'll all die*. The cop screamed at him, spit falling on his neck, his turned head. Pain dislocated his world for a moment as the cop struck him on the arm. *Gaia, this is hard*, images of dismemberment, bowels on the street, the dying faces of foes and himself howling triumph — *don't!* The asphalt ground into his face, his teeth. "Fuckin' anarchists!" The man pummeled him on the side of the head, dazing him. *Gaia, this is hard.* The baton hit him again, again, again, shoulders, back, once hard across his ass. One cop or two? He didn't know, mind awash in red.

He heard, not close, a wolf call, whose he didn't know. *Gaia, this is* — and his mind was lost in the Change, roaring like surf all through him. He was Glabro, big and tall enough for anyone's fantasies of super-manhood, the cop falling as he stood, time faster so that everyone seemed to stand still, claws flashing out as Rage shifted him to Crinos — *no! no!* He saw, he thought, cops and rioters alike fleeing, some of them lying in the street, some madly running into buildings. The protestor with the camcorder twisted away, the ready light out. The cops who'd hit him stood silent, unable to fight or even think in the face of Gaia's Chosen. His arm lifted for a deathblow (no way a human could survive even one strike from him now) and saw the knotted cord that had stayed with him as he Changed. Thoughts, faster even than his claws, raced across his mind. The cord—unity—packmates—the Children—Hack—peace—Hack.

Peace. Mandy's knowledge, Joné's hate of violence, Rich's iron willpower, his partner's love. The cord that no one could break, the connection that made them all one, all something greater than any one of them was alone. In a moment that lasted forever, he lowered his claw, willed — it was like pushing a Chevy— to Change back to the man he was, and would always be. Shirt and jeans torn, even though they were dedicated, he took the horror-blasted, paralyzed cop in his hands, pushed him gently to a curb, made him sit down. He saw that his own hands and arms were covered in spray paint, a huge splatter of paintball paint along his side. Blood but no marks, no scars. The Change had eaten Ringer's wounds, another evil blessing. The policeman, mouth open in shock, dropped his baton. It's okay, Ringer wanted to say. I won't hurt you, dude. But the words didn't come. That was okay.

It was an Ahroun's way to be silent.

Ringer made it to the alley before throwing up. He sat there a long time before Hack came, wolf-shaped, and nosed into his chest, licking Ringer's face. They waited till Ringer had stopped crying and his stomach was quiet, then walked through quieting streets to where their packmates waited.

Epilogue

Sunset Sea Caern, California, January 2000

The caern rang with the songs of the ritual, as Summer watched from a director's chair. Rich's father walked, danced, in a strange backward circle, spiraling outward from a face sandpainted at the circle's center. He then lay dazed-looking as the ritemaster, Silence-Covering-the-Sky, placed wafers of bread over his forehead and heart. She was a woman with red hair and freckles on her back, where her dress showed a curve of sunburn. "Into these, then, pass thy sins, and into who eats of them. May thy soul ascend to the sky, tossing on a fiery chariot...."

Rich sat uneasily by Mason, fidgeting from time to time. He'd said to Ringer earlier, "They don't know if this will work... they asked me if I even wanted to try. I said, sure. Go ahead. I mean, the worst that can happen is he stays like he is. Like he's been, for however long, since he fell, I guess. And it might, you know, work." Seattle had. The WTO hadn't met, and Pentex was that much further behind schedule. He'd even read a net-essay that mentioned the "giant wolfman puppets" that were seen during the protests, "awfully realistic, moving like a real person."

"What about the guy who eats the shit? He become a Black Spiral?"

"Not really. She just has to do a rite of cleansing, they think. She heard that there was a case where this actually worked. So she said she'd try it." The big man looked at the ground.

"You okay, dude?" Ringer punched Rich in the arm.

"Yeah. I think. I don't know... if anything he says is true, maybe I don't want this to work. But we have to try. Gaia, if we can bring one Black Spiral back...." He left unspoken the rest: make the Earth whole, heal the Fallen. More work than any one Garou, any one tribe, could do, would do. But it was the work that would restore the Mother.

The pack joined in the chanting, hoping. Eventually you came to the point, whatever you did, wherever you were, when that was all you could do. Gathers-Flinders bowed over the prostrate shape, ate the wafers, shuddering to swallow them with the flask of water that had rested between the werewolf's legs. Spasms wracked her body, and Mandy helped her sit down. They spoke, too soft for anyone to hear.

Ringer sat in the circle at the rite and bowed his head, praying silently for the best end to it all, however, whoever.

The (hopefully) no-longer Black Spiral lay in the circle, probably unconscious. When he woke — *who knows?* Ringer thought. Anything could happen.

• • •

Ringer woke, a moment's *where-am-I* resolving into *yeah* at the feel of his partner beside him. Early morning, sun through windows that Joné had likely opened en route to coffee. Hack slept on, blissful. He stretched, got up, and felt the past in the weight of his body on the floorboards. No pain, no scars: in that, Garou were more peaceful with themselves than humans could ever be. Into the kitchen in his Dalmatian-print boxers, he found dishes in the sink — the others had been and gone, maybe watched the sun rise over the forest. There was, of course, coffee on top of the stove. Beyond the window the bamboo waved in the wind, undulating like the sea.

He sat with a cup on the back steps, wondering whether Woodstock and Seattle had done any good in a sick, dying world. Saving a girl from a mob, protesting the Wyrm's hell-body of corporations, dancing while species went extinct, chanting over a Black Spiral to save him, or yourself....

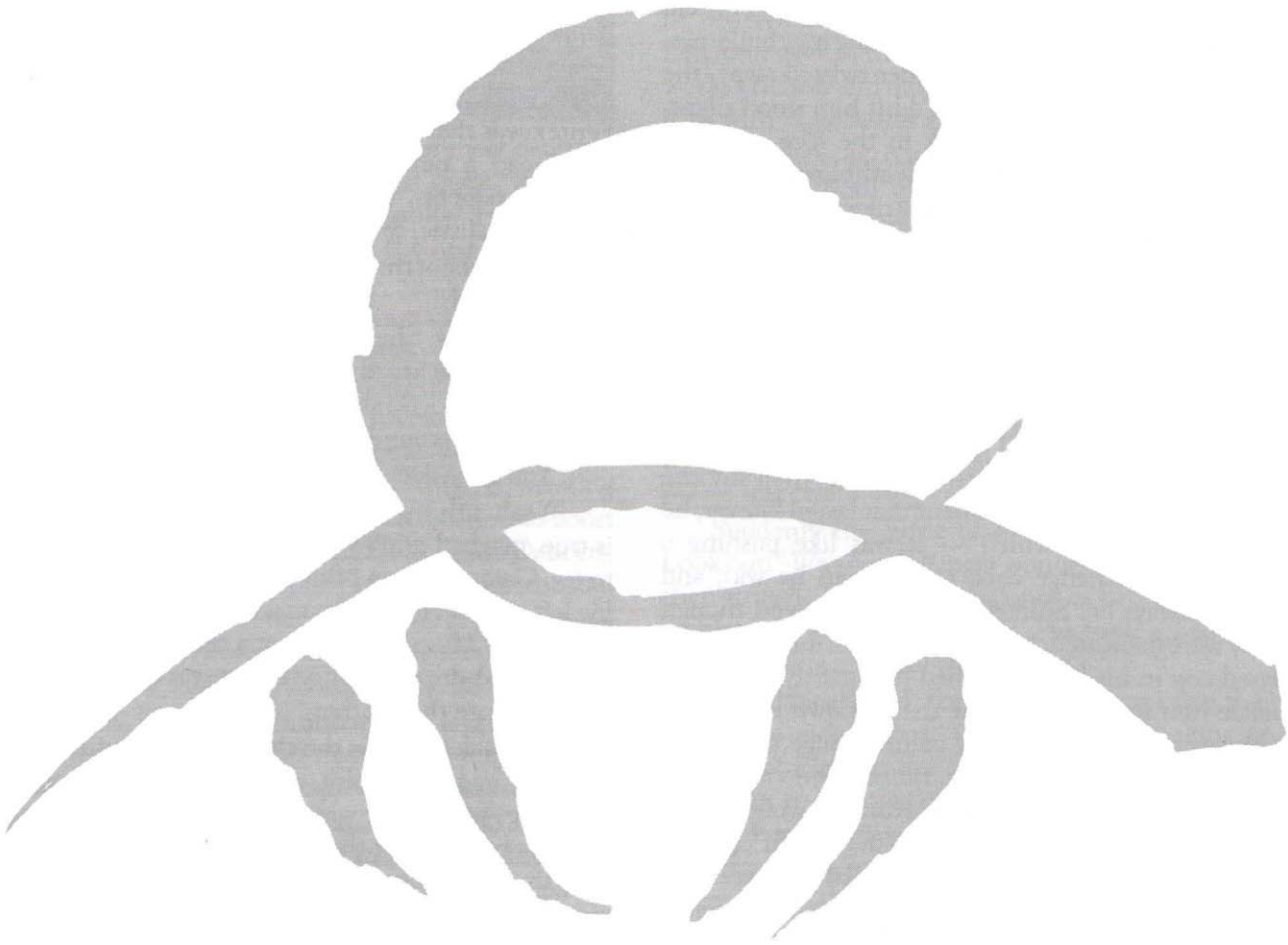
Of course it had done good. He couldn't stop the Apocalypse. But he could live his life, each day of his life, for good, not for ill. For good, not for gain. No matter where you were, you could serve Gaia, and he'd seen that himself. *Thanks, Soldier-of-Paradise.* What next?

I can go to Asia... or home. Or wherever. Where the pack goes. That's where I belong. They need me, I know that. I—

Need them. Wind stroked him, raised gooseflesh.

He stood, stretched, stepped back inside the little house to where Hack lay. Behind him, he saw a fleck of green-gold fall, land in the coffee, sink. Grain? It had the shape of an ear of wheat. He stooped and looked.

It was a bamboo flower.



Afterword: Peace as a Theme in Werewolf

by Chad Imbrogno

In a game populated with Rage-filled killing machines like the Garou, the concept of using peace as a theme for a chronicle shouldn't be that foreign. Just as you must have dark in order for there to be light, peace must exist for there to be violence. More than just being the downtime between ripping the Wyrm's spleen out on Thursdays, the study and examination of exactly what peace is can further strengthen the meaning behind all the violence. After all, what do the Garou expect to have when all the violence is done, on the long shot assumption that they "win"? Chances are they don't know since the exact nature of peace is always being debated; the Children of Gaia are good at the whole debate thing and engage in it enthusiastically. A chronicle that intends to focus on peace should also be something of an ongoing debate with many questions asked.

To begin with, what is Peace? Not just the literal definition, but what is the ideal, *really?* This is the big one and could drive an entire chronicle all by itself. Is it simply the absence of violence? Is it a personal state (inner peace) or a condition for society (civil peace), or the way of things among nations (peace in the usual sense of the "peace process" or "peace movements")? Is there some deeper spiritual requirement for true peace to be achieved? Opinions are varied and conflicting. This could be quite an epic subject for a pack to tackle; while it may seem a little formulaic, the notion of a pack traveling about and asking everyone they meet about the meaning of peace has the ring of legend to it. The very fact that they never get the same answer twice would be enough that songs would be sung about them for generations.

On a more practical level is the excellent example of the conflict of interest between the homid vision of Weaver-peace and the lupus Wyld-vision. The characters of a story could bring an end to the bloody practices of a lupus sept leader only to find that they have caused further violence by stifling a natural balance that had existed for years. One person's peace may be another's prison. When Children of Gaia get caught between two sides that only want "peace," what are they to do? The coming of the Apocalypse presents a third and most terrible alternative: that the final peace will be that of the Wyrm, the peace of total annihilation.

The example above also raises another good question; exactly who has the right to enforce peace? Is even enforcing peace an oxymoron? Medieval feudal lords maintained their personal "peace," (the origin of the charge of "disturbing the peace," a legal concept still in use) but their right to do so was backed by the not so peaceful concept of "might is right." Or was that concept peaceful after all? Look at the Balkans, where "peacekeeping forces" are at work. By what means or what right do they keep the peace? Is it even possible to create a lasting peace among humans? Do people, deep down, *really* want it? There are many sides to the arguments here, and a pack thrown into the middle will find itself faced with some hard choices, as long as they aren't already on one side or the other.

Of course, even assuming that anyone thinks they know what peace is, exactly how are they meant to achieve it? The real question here is whether peace should be a means or an end. Is a peace bought with war tarnished by the blood spilt to purchase it? Or is peace so important that its long-term attainment should be sought at any cost? Many Children of Gaia esteem peace as a sacred thing unto itself and the thought of anything but self-perpetuating peace is repugnant to them. They refuse all violence. A few others believe in the "break an egg to make an omelet" philosophy. Most view peace as an eternal struggle that lies somewhere in the middle. An egg eventually breaks, after all, when the chick hatches. While the "do anything for peace" crowd may be fairly easy for a pack to dismiss, the ones who worship peace could lay serious guilt trips on anyone who tries to dissuade them to do otherwise. Legendary martyrs are born of this mold, ones that can drive the characters to greatness (or at least a good deal of introspection.)

Perhaps the Get of Fenris would speak the most difficult question about peace that could be asked; "Why bother?" For many, the end of struggle is beyond imagining; certainly for the Garou, who cannot imagine life without the Rage within their hearts. One of the most time-honored plots dealing with this subject is the soldier who doesn't know anything but war and therefore fears peace. Often he is depicted as sabotaging the peace process just to keep the war going. This aspect could be employed by a Storyteller to cover the entire Garou nation; the werewolves have known nothing but war and the ever-impending Apocalypse. Perhaps the reason the Wyrm has grown so strong is because the Garou secretly fear what will become of them once Gaia no longer needs their Rage? As either a massive conspiracy or just the unconscious desires of a collective Garou psyche, this could be a world-shaking development for a chronicle.

Remember that the search for peace isn't just for the Children of Gaia. Only the most war-obsessed Garou doesn't contemplate what life after victory would be like. In many ways it's this search that keeps the War of the Apocalypse raging, the idea that there may be something better to be had once all the strife is over. Of course, peace is a never-ending struggle, but people can dream, can't they?

Dedication

To Christopher John Goodgion and Jim Hoeft, soldiers of paradise.

Author's Special Thanks

Thanks again to the clutch — oh, I mean the pack: Chad, Mike, Meegan, Dean, Neal and Steph. Thanks to Chad, Neal and Steph for doing good research.

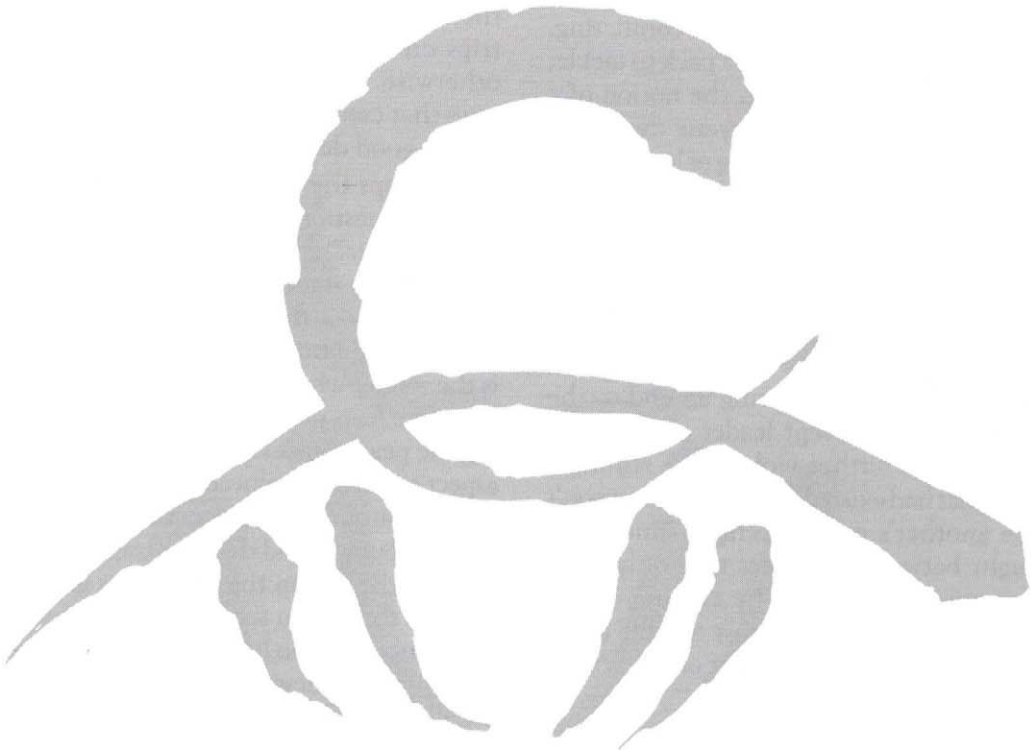
Thanks to Mark for being my inspiration for peace, and to Ursula K. Le Guin for seeing a world where peace was real.

Last, thanks to my students and friends aboard the USS MITSCHER.

Author's Afterword

This book is fantasy, and werewolves are imaginary creatures. But the causes that the Children of Gaia fight for are real, and so are the people, in our world, who work for them. Like the World of Darkness, our own world is in serious trouble. It does not have the Garou to defend it. But it has you and me. Issues I've worked on include women's reproductive rights, gay civil rights, recycling, organic gardening and farming, and police brutality. There are many other worthwhile causes, and I'd urge you to consider working for or donating to them.

Thanks.



Children of Gaia™

Name:	Breed:	Pack Name:
Player:	Auspice:	Pack Totem:
Chronicle:	Camp:	Concept:

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●OOOO	Charisma	●OOOO	Perception	●OOOO
Dexterity	●OOOO	Manipulation	●OOOO	Intelligence	●OOOO
Stamina	●OOOO	Appearance	●OOOO	Wits	●OOOO

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	OOOOO	Animal Ken	OOOOO	Computer	OOOOO
Athletics	OOOOO	Crafts	OOOOO	Enigmas	OOOOO
Brawl	OOOOO	Drive	OOOOO	Investigation	OOOOO
Dodge	OOOOO	Etiquette	OOOOO	Law	OOOOO
Empathy	OOOOO	Firearms	OOOOO	Linguistics	OOOOO
Expression	OOOOO	Leadership	OOOOO	Medicine	OOOOO
Intimidation	OOOOO	Melee	OOOOO	Occult	OOOOO
Primal-Urge	OOOOO	Performance	OOOOO	Politics	OOOOO
Streetwise	OOOOO	Stealth	OOOOO	Rituals	OOOOO
Subterfuge	OOOOO	Survival	OOOOO	Science	OOOOO

Advantages

Backgrounds		Gifts	Gifts
	OOOOO		
	OOOOO		
	OOOOO		
	OOOOO		
	OOOOO		

Renown

Glory

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Honor

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Wisdom

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Rank

Rage

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Gnosis

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Willpower

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Health

Bruised		❑
Hurt	-1	❑
Injured	-1	❑
Wounded	-2	❑
Mauled	-2	❑
Crippled	-5	❑
Incapacitated		❑

Tribal Weakness

WEAK VEIL:
WITNESSES AT +4
ON DELIRIUM CHART

Children of Gaia™

Homid	Glabro	Crinos	Hispo	Lupus
No Change	Strength (+2)____	Strength (+4)____	Strength (+3)____	Strength (+1)____
	Stamina (+2)____	Dexterity (+1)____	Dexterity (+2)____	Dexterity (+2)____
	Appearance (-1)____	Stamina (+3)____	Stamina (+3)____	Stamina (+2)____
	Manipulation (-2)____	Appearance 0	Manipulation (-3)____	Manipulation (-3)____
		Manipulation (-3)____	+1 Die to Bite Damage	-2 Perception Diff.
Difficulty: 6	Difficulty: 7	Difficulty: 6	Difficulty: 7	Difficulty: 6
		INCITE DELIRIUM IN HUMANS		

Other Traits

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Fetishes

Item:_____ Level____ Gnosis____
Power:_____
Item:_____ Level____ Gnosis____
Power:_____
Item:_____ Level____ Gnosis____
Power:_____
Item:_____ Level____ Gnosis____
Power:_____

Rites

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Combat

Maneuver/Weapon	Roll	Difficulty	Damage	Range	Rate	Clip

Brawling Chart

Maneuver	Roll	Diff	Damage
Bite	Dex+Brawl	5	Strength+1/A
Body Tackle	Dex+Brawl	7	Special/B
Claw	Dex+Brawl	6	Strength+1/A
Grapple	Dex+Brawl	6	Strength/B
Kick	Dex+Brawl	7	Strength+1/B
Punch	Dex+Brawl	6	Strength/B

A=Aggravated Damage
B=Bashing Damage

Armor:_____

Children of Gaia™

Nature: **Demeanor:**

Merits & Flaws

Merit	Type	Cost	Flaw	Type	Bonus

Expanded Background

Allies

Mentor

Ancestors

Pure Breed

Contacts

Resources

Kinfolk

Totem

Possessions

Gear (Carried):

Equipment (Owned):

Sept

Name:

Caern Location:

Level: Type:

Totem:

Leader:

Experience

TOTAL:

Gained From:

TOTAL SPENT:

Spent On:

Children of Gaia™

History

Prelude

Description

Age:
Hair:
Eyes:
Race:
Nationality:
Sex:

	Height	Weight
Homid:		
Glabro:		
Crinos:		
Hispo:		
Lupus:		

Battle Scars:

Metis Deformity:

Visuals

Pack Chart

Character Sketch

TRIBEBOOK: CHILDREN of GAIA™

For a Mother's Love

Since the birth of the tribes themselves, the Children of Gaia have suffered under the heaviest burden ever laid on any werewolf — the struggle to end not just the War of the Apocalypse, but war itself. But even with the blessings of Gaia, this is no easy task — the Children must fight not only to sway others to their cause, but they must struggle against the violence that beats within their own hearts. For the sake of the world, they must succeed. For their own sakes, they must be ready to die trying.

Born to War; Chosen for Healing

Tribebook: Children of Gaia takes a long look at the peacemakers of the Garou Nation, from the mediators of the Patient Deed to the militant warriors of the Imminent Strike. From the end of the Impergium to the End Times, from the freely shared gifts of healing to the tribe's dark secrets, it's all here. The longest, hardest struggle of all awaits — can your character shoulder the burden of bringing peace to a world that doesn't want it?

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